

*Growth and Livability Analysis*

Project Technical Memorandum:  
Westside Economic Study

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### **Executive Summary**

This memorandum considers the interrelationship between livability (or quality of life) and economic growth. Quality of life is a commonly used, yet difficult to define term. Quality of life is not a scientifically determined nor universally agreed upon concept, but rather is an amalgam of the attitudes, beliefs and values of a region's residents. Examining the available data on the attitudes of Westside residents and also considering documents and policies that express public policies on related issues, we are able to identify a number of aspects of quality of life that seem particularly important. Like other Oregonians and residents of the metropolitan area, Westsiders regard the region's natural beauty, recreational opportunities and commitment to environmental quality as key aspects of the quality of life. Westside residents differ in important respects from others in the region. They regard traffic congestion as more serious, are less concerned about crime and regard the region's recent growth more favorably than other metro residents.

We examined major trends in quality of life indicators. The county has not adopted or endorsed any formal set of indicators, so we focused on those measured by the Oregon Progress Board, supplemented by our own analysis of economic trends. Indicators of livability have generally improved, but some measures, like the poverty rate have weakened. The rising costs of housing and medical care have affected conditions for many families particularly those in the low income groups. The county has made modest improvements in the measurable quality of its educational institutions.

There is a strong, two-way inter-relationship between livability and economic growth. The region's economic growth has been driven in large part by region's and the Westside's quality of life. Livability has attracted and retained talented workers, making the region a desirable place for high tech firms to start and expand. The Westside's livability has, in turn, been affected by economic growth. The Westside has considerably more jobs and economic opportunities than one or two decades ago, but housing prices are higher and traffic congestion has worsened.

Quality of life is less a scientific judgment than it is a matter of community consensus and political leadership. While our analysis offers some evidence about the kinds of considerations Westside residents most value about their local quality of life, ultimately these livability values should be spelled out by leaders as a matter of public policy and be monitored accordingly. Given the essential connection between quality of life and prosperity, this should be part of the Westside's economic strategy.

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## Introduction

Quality of life figures prominently in any discussion of the Westside's well-being and economic future. Westside residents, like others in the metro area, Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, place a high value on the unique aspects of living in this environment. Understanding the critical elements that constitute the quality of life, and how they are inter-related with the region's economic well-being are vital to planning for the future.

This analysis is divided into four major parts. Part I explores the definition of the region's quality of life. Part II looks at how particular measures of quality of life, including indicators and perceptions have changed. Part III discusses the two-way relationship between quality of life and the economy. Part IV offers some conclusions about how to address quality of life as part of the process for planning for the region's economic future.

This memorandum is part of a study of the Westside Economy commissioned by the Westside Consortium for Economic Health. This is one of three parts of a technical analysis being prepared on the Westside Economy; two other memoranda address structure and performance of the Westside economy and 21st century economic strategies. Funding for this project has been provided, in part, by the Multnomah-Washington County Regional Investment Board with lottery funds from the Regional Investment Program of the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department. The principal author of this report was Impresa economist Joseph Cortright. Heike Mayer researched and wrote portions of this report dealing with local policies and county level indicators. The authors want to thank Scott Stewart of the Portland-Multnomah Progress Board for providing data on traffic congestion in the region, and Davis, Hibbitts & McHaig and Portland General for providing access to their survey data.. The views expressed are those of the authors, and not necessarily those of the consortium or its members.

## 1.0 Defining Westside Quality of Life

The first step in our analysis of inter-relationships between growth and livability is to identify the key factors that shape the perceived quality of life in the Westside area. Analyzing quality of life is often complicated because of the ambiguity of this term. We rely on our reviews of statements by Westside key stakeholders, empirical evidence on quality of life indicators and existing policy and planning documents to specify and describe the important aspects of the Westside's quality of life.

Quality of life has many important dimensions. We provide a framework for thinking about these different dimensions and an indicative, but not exhaustive, list of some of the important ways people describe quality of life. Our perceptions of quality of life are geographically-nested. Some aspects of quality of life are national (or even global) others derive from the characteristics of the community or metropolitan area we inhabit.

For more than a quarter century, there has been a strong interest in measuring quality of life and attempting to objectively rank states or metropolitan areas based on livability. One EPA-funded study in 1975 considered 123 factors and ranked all of the nation's 243 metropolitan areas according to quality of life triggered a long, and still unresolved debate about who is number one (Liu 1975). Emerging from these studies is the fact that there is no single, agreed upon definition of quality of life.

Every individual has her or his own perceptions of what factors contribute to a good quality of life. Quality of life measures typically use a single system of weights for the values attached to particular attributes, which fail to reflect the diversity of preferences of different individuals (Gillingham and Reece 1979). As a practical matter, applying quality of life considerations to public policy is a political rather than a scientific process, one resolved best by dialogue and consensus among diverse community members and not subject to independent third-party definition. As a myriad of conflicting rankings of the relative quality of life in different places attest, there are as many different possible ways of viewing quality of life as there are scholars studying it.

### 1.1 Dimensions of Quality of Life

There are a number of different dimensions of quality of life that are commonly used to measure or evaluate livability of particular places. We provide a brief review of these dimensions below:

**Physical Setting/Climate.** A fundamental aspect of place is the physical setting and climate or the natural environment. Climate has been a particularly powerful factor in driving inter-regional migration within the United States; net migration has flowed steadily from places with high levels of precipitation, and low January temperatures to the drier, warmer parts of the nation.

**Built Environment:** Man's alterations to the natural environment are a second key feature of quality of life. Historic patterns of development, population density, streetscapes, and land use planning all shape or represent aspects of the quality of life.

**Social/Cultural.** Opportunities for social interaction and participation in cultural activities are another aspect of quality of life. The social and cultural aspects of the quality of life are varied, ranging from schools to clubs to religious organizations, to more general features of society such as tolerance of those outside the ethnic or cultural majority and the overall “friendliness” of a community.

**Civic Engagement.** Closely related to the social and cultural life of a place is the degree of civic engagement of the population. Popularized by Harvard’s Robert Putnam, civic engagement is a feature of popular attitudes and of the effectiveness of local institutions. Are citizens engaged in organizations and activities that promote social interaction and problem-solving, or are citizens suspicious, distrustful and disengaged?

**Consumption Opportunities.** One of the major attributes of place that people value is the number and range of private consumption opportunities. One of the historic advantages of larger cities, and one that is of increasing importance to urban places today according to economist Edward Glaeser (2000), is the numerous and varied kinds of shops and services. Specialized forms of recreation or consumption, like sporting events, theatres or skiing also fall into this category.

**Public Goods/Amenities.** Government services and publicly supported activities, ranging from education, to parks, to transportation to museums and police and fire protection are what economists call public goods, because they are typically available equally to all residents of a given jurisdiction. The quality and availability of these public goods, particularly good K-12 education, has long been recognized as an important element in residential location decisions, and is an important consideration in quality of life. In addition to public goods, there are disamenities as well, like crime and pollution, that diminish the quality of life of particular areas.

**Economic Opportunity.** Another important aspect of quality of life is the ability to find a job, to pursue a career or to start a business. There are a wide variety of approaches to measuring the variation in economic opportunity among places, from counting the number of self-employed persons and new business startups, to examining employment growth rates, local tax levels and the number of millionaires.

## ***1.2 Nesting of Quality of Life Perceptions***

Any analysis of quality of life considerations has to recognize the various geographic levels and sense of identity that individuals share. We should think of our understanding of quality of life as being nested in several different levels of identity. As psychologists remind us, many of the attitudes and perceptions of quality of life that we have are those we share with the rest of humanity, and certain fundamental needs are apparent throughout the world. Closer to home, some of our perceptions of quality of life are national in scope, as the attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> revealed.

For our purposes though, we are interested most in those distinctive aspects of quality of life that the region’s residents value about this location. Some of these aspects of quality of life are shared with other places in Oregon and in the Pacific

Northwest. Our sense of the value of the natural environment, for example, has much to do with our climate (shared throughout the region) and our access to nearby natural resources, (such as the Pacific Ocean and the Cascades).

More narrowly, our greatest interest is in attitudes about the quality of life in the Portland metropolitan area and in Washington County.

### **1.3 Measures of Quality of Life**

There are many possible ways in which we can measure the quality of life. Because quality of life is intimately tied up with people's perceptions, data about attitudes, opinions and beliefs can signal what is important. We can also deduce the important aspects of quality of life from behavior—particularly from the choices people make. Plans and policies also serve as a vehicle for expressing important aspects of quality of life. We consider each of these sources of information in turn.

#### **Attitudes & Beliefs**

Public opinion polling poses questions about issues that relate directly to quality of life. A series of public opinion polls conducted over the last decade have probed attitudes about growth and livability. The Oregon Values and Beliefs study commissioned by the Oregon Business Council in the early 1990s tried to examine what people regard as most important to their life in this state (Davis and Hibbitts 1996). In the late 1990s, Metro asked regional residents about their attitudes toward future growth patterns (Davis and Hibbitts 1997). A recent public opinion poll conducted on behalf of Portland General Electric provides some insights into those issues most on the minds of Washington County residents, and in turn suggests what matters to them about quality of life (Davis 2001). Together, these sources of information allow us to describe the key aspects of quality of life and to examine the particular opinions of Washington County residents.

Our analysis of these quality of life perceptions begins by examining statements about the most valued aspects of living in Oregon, then shifts our focus to the changing perception of different problems confronting the state, and then turns to the specific attitudes about growth and the environment, and finally considers one signal indicator of livability: traffic congestion.

#### **What People Value About Oregon**

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Study set the ambitious target of trying to define and measure the common values that Oregonians share. The study posed a wide range of questions dealing with personal values and attitudes, the importance of family, spirituality, work and other issues. More closely relevant to our concerns about livability, the study also asked residents to identify those aspects of Oregon that were of greatest value to them, personally. A summary of the results of their survey, detailed by county, is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Valued Aspects of Living in Oregon, 1992  
 What do you personally value about living in Oregon? (Multiple responses allowed)

	Metro	Clackamas	Multnomah	Washington
The natural beauty	31%	28%	32%	32%
Environmental quality/environmental ethic	13%	13%	14%	14%
Recreation opportunities	9%	11%	9%	9%
Casual/slow pace of life/not too big or crowded	7%	5%	8%	6%
The people are open-minded, friendly, tolerant	7%	7%	7%	8%
I like the weather	7%	9%	7%	6%
Community spirit/community involvement/helping others	5%	4%	4%	5%
It's home/family & friends here/my job is here	4%	5%	4%	5%
Strong diverse economy/good business climate	2%	2%	3%	1%
Good/progressive government and or programs	3%	3%	2%	1%
No sales tax/lower or fair taxes	1%	1%	3%	1%
Good land use & transportation system & planning	2%	2%	2%	2%
Feel secure/familiar/comfortable/safe	1%	1%	1%	2%
Strong sense of family or moral value/conservative attitude	2%	2%	1%	2%
Good educational system, schools or colleges	2%	2%	1%	2%
Availability of arts and culture	2%	2%	1%	2%

(Davis and Hibbitts 1996)

Answers to this question were open ended and individual respondents could offer multiple responses. The survey tabulators grouped and analyzed responses. The top three responses all relate to the area's natural beauty, environmental quality and the recreational opportunities they afford. No other responses captured even ten percent of the total response to this question.

### Problems Facing Oregon

An alternative way of expressing values—and one that is more commonly used in opinion surveys—is to query respondents about those issues they regard as the greatest problems facing the state or region. We have some comparative data from 1992 and 2001 that shows how perceptions have changed over time.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Study asked respondents to identify the problem facing Oregon that most needed to be fixed. The responses to this question are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Problems Oregon Needs to Fix, 1992

If you could fix anything about Oregon, what would it be? (Multiple responses allowed)

Problem	Metro	Clackamas	Multnomah	Washington
Reduce crime/drugs/gangs/increase police/jails/reform	13%	5%	16%	13%
Fix tax system/tax reform/change taxes	11%	14%	8%	16%
Increase emphasis on environment/less pollution/better life quality	9%	5%	12%	6%
Reduce government/government waste/reduce taxes	9%	14%	6%	9%
Reduce cost of living/housing/health care	8%	5%	8%	11%
Increase employment/job security/wages	7%	6%	7%	6%
Fix government/make accountable/less corruption/reform	7%	9%	7%	5%
More education reform/higher education quality	6%	9%	7%	4%
Balanced economy/planned growth/more diversity	6%	6%	6%	5%
More tolerance of others/diversity/personal freedom	5%	8%	6%	3%
Increased emphasis on family/community/having values	4%	4%	3%	3%
Reduce cost of education	4%	4%	3%	5%
Reduce population/less overcrowding	3%	3%	2%	3%

(Davis and Hibbitts 1996)

Another survey conducted by the same firm, this time on behalf of Metro, posed a similar question, asking respondents to identify the biggest problem facing the region in 1997. Unlike the Values and Beliefs Study, which framed issues in a more long-term fashion, this question focused attention on the current problems facing the region, and may reflect shorter term considerations. Table 3 illustrates the responses to this question. (The survey authors reported results for individual counties only when the variation in county level response was statistically significant; un-reported values should be assumed to be identical to the value shown for the metropolitan region). In 1997, two problems stood out: school funding and traffic congestion. School funding narrowly edged out traffic congestion as the leading problem region-wide, but congestion in Washington County was perceived to be the leading problem by a two to one margin (24 percent to 12 percent). Related issues of transit, road improvements and overpopulation also underscore the importance of growth concerns.

Table 3: Biggest Problem Facing Tri-County Area, 1997

	Metro	Clackamas	Multnomah	Washington
School Funding/Lack of Fund	18%	18%	21%	12%
Traffic Congestion		15%	13%	10%
Overpopulation/Population Growth		5%		
Crime		5%		
Need more mass transit/finish light rail		5%		
Road Improvements/repairs		5%	10%	2%
School Quality		4%		
Property Taxes too high/reduce property taxes		4%		
Too much Building/development		3%		

(Davis and Hibbitts 1997)

The Portland General survey conducted in November 2001 asked a pair of questions about the problems most plaguing the state. Clearly, concerns about the economy were foremost on the public's mind due to the economic recession at that time, a stark contrast to 1992. Currently, it appears that Washington County residents share the same concerns as other Oregon residents, especially with the economy, and with the education system, when asked an open-ended question about the biggest problem facing Oregon. See Table 4. However, Washington County residents were about twice as likely as other metropolitan area residents and about 5 times as likely as residents outside the metropolitan area to identify traffic congestion and transportation as major issues.

Table 4: Major Problems Facing Oregon, 2001

	Washington	Tri-County	Rest of State
Economy/Unemployment	34%	39%	36%
Education/School Funding	16%	13%	10%
Traffic Congestion/Transportation/Roads	10%	5%	2%

(Davis 2001)

A related question, asking residents to rate the relative importance of various issues reveals a similar pattern. Table 5 shows Washington County residents are more likely to regard the condition of the transportation system as a very serious or fairly serious issue than other Oregonians. Washington County residents regard crime as a less serious problem than other Oregonians. This represents something of a change from 1992, when county residents were just as likely as other residents of the region to identify crime as a major issue.

Table 5: Seriousness of Various Issues facing Oregon, 2001

(Rated Very Serious or Fairly Serious)

	Washington	Tri-County	Rest of State
The Economy & Job Situation	82%	83%	83%
Education Funding	75%	71%	66%
Affordable Housing	75%	70%	61%
Quality of Education	64%	69%	60%
Growth & Development	64%	67%	57%
Crime: Serious or Very Serious	43%	54%	63%
Oregon's Environmental Quality	53%	48%	36%
Transportation System Condition	51%	44%	40%
Quality of Political Leadership	42%	49%	45%

(Davis 2001)

Inasmuch as the economy was the issue most on everyone's mind at the end of 2001, it is worth examining in greater detail the perceptions the region's residents had about recent economic performance and the future economic outlook. Two common questions posed by pollsters are: "Are you better off today than you were a year ago?" and "Do you expect next year will be better or worse than the past year?" The results to these questions for Washington County, the metropolitan area and the balance of the state are shown in Table 7. This table omits persons answering "same" or "no opinion" to these questions.

Table 6: Attitudes About the Economy, 2001

## 5. Feelings About the Economy

	Washington	Tri-County	Rest of State
Better off than a Year Ago	26%	30%	21%
Worse off than a Year Ago	26%	25%	24%
Next Year will be better	50%	41%	28%
Next Year will be worse	10%	12%	20%

(Davis 2001)

Oregonians were about evenly divided as to whether they were worse off or better off in 2001 than a year previous. Washington County residents were slightly less upbeat about their economic performance than other tri-county residents but slightly more upbeat than those outside the Portland area, though neither difference is statistically significant. The outlook for the coming year, however, varies sharply across the state. Washington County residents, by a margin of about 5 to 1, have a very optimistic view of the coming year. Other metro area residents are also optimistic, while those outside Portland have only a slightly positive view (those expecting a better year outnumber those expecting a worse one by less than 3 to 2).

## Attitudes Toward Growth and the Environment

To better understand the interconnections between growth and livability, it is helpful to examine specific questions that test various attitudes about these issues. Several questions in the Oregon Values and Beliefs Study and subsequent polling pose various choices for respondents.

The Oregon Values and Beliefs Study outlined a number of possible trends and asked respondents to indicate whether they regarded these trends as desirable or undesirable. Several of the questions asked about the trend in future development in the region. One question anticipated the possibility that environmental considerations would become more important than economic growth. As illustrated in Table 7, more than 60 percent of the region's population regarded this prospect as desirable or very desirable. While the support for this position was strongest in Multnomah County, more than three-fifths of Washington County's population agreed with this position.

Table 7: Tradeoff Between Environment and Growth, 1992

Question: Environmental Protection will become more important than economic growth

	Metro	Clackamas	Multnomah	Washington
Very Desirable	32%	15%	39%	28%
Somewhat Desirable	31%	24%	38%	36%
Neutral	13%	33%	3%	11%
Somewhat Undesirable	16%	15%	13%	23%
Very Undesirable	8%	12%	7%	2%

(Davis and Hibbitts 1996)

A related question has to do with the pattern of future growth. The study also asked residents how they felt about a trend toward concentrating growth in existing cities and leaving undeveloped areas undeveloped. Here, overall opinion was more divided, with 44 percent regarding this as somewhat or very desirable and 37 percent regarding it as somewhat or very undesirable and the remainder neutral. Washington County residents were most strongly in favor of this trend (55 percent rating in somewhat or very desirable); while Clackamas County residents regarded least favorably.

Table 8: Support for Compact Growth and Protecting Undeveloped Areas, 1992

Question: Growth will be concentrated in existing cities and undeveloped areas will be left undeveloped.

	Metro	Clackamas	Multnomah	Washington
Very Desirable	25%	10%	23%	36%
Somewhat Desirable	19%	23%	22%	19%
Neutral	19%	19%	14%	15%
Somewhat Undesirable	21%	29%	25%	21%
Very Undesirable	16%	19%	16%	9%

(Davis and Hibbitts 1996)

In 2001, the PGE survey asked Oregonians their view of the impact of growth. Respondents were read the following two statements and asked to identify which best represented their feelings about growth.

Overall, growth has been good for Oregon. It has helped diversify our economy, helped create new products and markets for Oregon businesses and brought people to Oregon who share Oregonians' values.

Overall, growth has been bad for Oregon. It has increased traffic and environmental problems, while the economic benefits of growth have been limited to only a few areas. Growth has also brought a lot of people to Oregon who don't share Oregonians' values. (Davis 2001)

The responses to this choice of statements are shown Table 9. Statewide, there was a fairly even division of opinion on the subject, but the results vary substantially by region. While residents of the Portland metropolitan area felt growth was good (55 percent to 41 percent), Oregonians outside the metro area felt growth was bad (50 percent to 44 percent). Washington County residents were strong believers that growth had been good, with more than 60 percent of the respondents endorsing the "growth has been good" proposition.

Table 9: Attitudes about Growth, 2001

Question: Growth will be concentrated in existing cities and undeveloped areas will be left undeveloped.

	Washington	Tri-County	Rest of State
Growth is Good	61%	55%	44%
Growth is Bad	37%	41%	50%

(Davis 2001)

Perhaps the ultimate test of the depth of sentiment about a particular problem is public willingness to support additional taxes to address it. The survey asked respondents to identify those purposes for which they would be most likely to support a tax increase. (Notice this question stopped well short of asking respondents if they supported a tax increase, instead asking only which purposes for which they would be "most likely" to support an increase). As Table 10 shows, the strongest support statewide would be for a tax increase for K-12 education; in fact it was the only area that a majority of respondents indicated a likelihood of supporting increased taxes. Road and highways ranked second throughout the state. Washington County residents were noticeably more likely to support tax increases for K-12 education and for roads, but interestingly less likely to support tax increases for public safety.

Table 10: Likelihood of Supporting Taxes, 2001

Question: What Tax Increases would you be most likely to support?

	Washington	Tri-County	Rest of State
K-12 Education	73%	63%	51%
Roads and Highways	47%	42%	38%
Public Safety	15%	21%	24%
Libraries	19%	0%	0%
Parks & Recreation	11%	0%	0%
None	10%	0%	0%

(Davis 2001)

### Traffic and Congestion

Especially for Washington County residents, concern about traffic congestion and the transportation system is seen as the chief disamenity of urban life. Even though they are the most supportive in the region (and the state) of the benefits of growth, they are also the most outspoken about the concern about traffic congestion.

The differences between Washington County and other parts of the region are underscored by the results of another opinion survey, this one conducted in May, 2001 (prior to the advent of the current recession). As Table 11 confirms, Washington County residents feel much more strongly about traffic congestion and the inadequacy of the local transportation system than do their neighbors around the metropolitan region. Nearly half of Washington County residents agreed with a statement that the region's transportation system was not adequate. A third of the residents of Washington County rated traffic congestion as the biggest problem facing the region, compared with less than a quarter of the residents of the other county's in the region. Although the relative importance of transportation issues in the minds of the region's residents has declined during the current recession (see Table 4), Washington County residents clearly perceive this as a problem.

Table 11: Attitudes about Travel and Congestion, 2001

Region	Transportation system not adequate	Biggest problem facing region is traffic congestion)
Metropolitan Portland	41%	25%
Washington County	49%	34%
Multnomah County	36%	21%
Clackamas County	42%	22%

(Davis &amp; Hibbitts, 2001)

Is traffic congestion measurably worse in Washington County than elsewhere in the region? While congestion is often in the eye of the commuter, there are some aggregate statistics that can be used to portray the differences in congestion in the region (and in the nation). For example, Table 12 shows average commute times in the Portland metropolitan area and other metropolitan areas in the Western US.

By a small margin, Washington County residents have shorter commutes than other residents in the region. Overall, commutes in metro Portland are shorter than in other Western metropolitan areas—about three minutes shorter than Seattle and more than four minutes shorter than Los Angeles.

Table 12: Average Commute Times, 2000

Region	Average Commute Time (Minutes)
Washington County, OR	23.5
Multnomah County, OR	23.6
Clackamas County, OR	24.4
Clark County, WA	24.3
Los Angeles-Long Beach CA	28.0
Sacramento, CA	25.7
Seattle, WA	26.8
United States	24.3

(Census 2000 Supplemental Survey (experimental data))

Another indicator of the severity of traffic congestion problems is the number of residents commuting 30 minutes or less (each way) to work. As Table 13 shows, a larger fraction of Washington County residents have commutes of a half hour or less than any other part of the metropolitan area.

Table 13: Percent of the Population Commuting 30 minutes or less, 2000

Region	Percent of the Population Commuting 30 minutes or less
Washington County, OR	71.3%
Multnomah County, OR	68.3%
Clackamas County, OR	62.5%
Clark County, WA	68.0%

(Census 2000 Supplemental Survey (experimental data))

Why then, if commutes for Washington County residents are shorter, would the perception of traffic congestion be so much worse? There are several possible explanations. First, Census statistics report travel time, not distance; it may be that while Washington County residents are spending less time commuting, they are moving more slowly. This seems especially likely to be the case given Washington County's increasing role as a job provider to the region (See "The Westside Economy," Project Technical Memorandum, page 24). Second, perceptions of congestion may have much to do with the *change* in congestion as in the *level* of congestion. Because Washington County has experienced faster job and population growth than the region as a whole, the traffic situation may have worsened more there than elsewhere, influencing perceptions.

### **Behaviors: Things Look Different Here**

One way we can assess the distinctive attributes of the quality of life of a particular place is to draw inferences from the behaviors of a region's residents. If the residents of a particular region engages in some activity proportionately

more than does the average American, it seems reasonable to suggest that such an activity may be a more important part of their quality of life. Table 14 indicates some of the distinctive behaviors of metropolitan Portland-area residents.

Table 15: What's Distinctive About Metro Portland's Quality of Life?

#### Evidence from Differences in Behavior

##### Physical Activity

Compared to the average for metro areas, Metro Portland residents are:

- Twice as likely to go camping
- 60% more likely to go hiking or backpacking
- 40% more likely to golf or hunt
- Portland ranks last in theme park attendance
- Oregonians rank lowest in sedentary life styles and 2nd highest of vigorous physical activity

##### Literacy

- Portland area residents spend 37% more on reading material
- Are 11% more likely to be avid readers
- Portland ranks 7th in the US in newspaper circulation
- Rank 181st of 211 in % of population with cable; 191st in sport viewership

##### Technological Adeptness

- Metro Portland residents are 10% more likely to own a PC and 15% more likely to own a Mac than average urban resident
- Portland ranked 15th in WorldWide Web Activity
- 70% of the metro area population has internet access

##### Connection to the Environment

- Metro residents are 15% more likely to participate in wildlife & environmental activities
- Oregonians are two-thirds more likely to belong to an environmental organization
- Rank sixth (of 211) for fraction that gardens flowers; 25% more likely to have a flower or vegetable garden, 70% more likely to subscribe to Organic Gardening

##### Drinking to your health

- Oregonians spend 17% more on alcoholic beverages than other Americans
- Metro area residents are 16% more likely to be avid wine-drinkers
- Portland is the largest of 11 markets rated above average in herbal tea and ground coffee consumption

Source: Cortright, J. (2002). "The Economic Importance of Being Different: Regional Variations in Tastes, Increasing Returns and the Dynamics of Development." *Economic Development Quarterly* 16 (1): 3-16.

## Plans and Policies

Public policies frequently make statements or decisions that implicitly or explicitly reflect quality of life judgments. Strategic plans and policies in Oregon have a long history of addressing quality of life objectives: In 1989, Oregon's strategic plan, Oregon Shines, stated that quality of life is a major strength of the state's communities and will be a pillar in their future economic success. When Oregon Shines was updated in 1997, broad brush quality of life statements have been fine tuned to address specific issues related to safe, caring and engaged communities and a sustainable environment. However, the Oregon Shines documents do not provide a roadmap for individual communities about how they can meet the plan's goals. Rather, Oregon's communities have individually taken on the task of developing plans that fit their individual needs and address specific economic and community development issues.

In the late 1990s, the two most populous cities on the Westside - Beaverton and Hillsboro - began to develop elaborate community and economic development strategies that address important aspects of quality of life. These strategies and visions emerged from broad-based participatory community discussions from which values and ideas for these plans and strategies emerged. Aspects of quality of life emerged from these public processes and there is a general trend towards linking economic development goals to community development efforts aimed at improving a community's quality of life.

The City of Hillsboro is currently implementing its vision plan (Hillsboro 2020 Vision and Action Plan, <http://www.ci.hillsboro.or.us/Vision/>) which was developed over a three year period with extensive public input. The plan outlines visions and strategies for six focus areas: Strengthening and sustaining community, enhancing neighborhoods and districts, preserving the environment, creating economic opportunity, expanding educational and cultural horizons, and promoting health and safety. These six areas address important aspects of quality of life. However, the vision plan does not explicitly provide a roadmap for linking quality of life objectives with economic development objectives.

Beaverton's Economic Development Strategic Plan (<http://www.ci.beaverton.or.us/departments/downtown/strategicplan.html>) explicitly addresses the relationship between economic development and quality of life objectives. The plan states that "in addition to issues that affect the direct operations of a business, there are quality of life factors from parks and arts to public safety that are critical to the overall economic environment that attracts and retains business owners and their workforce." Furthermore, the plan states that successfully linking economic development strategies with community development efforts will enhance the economic and social well-being of Beaverton.

Such broad-based public processes demonstrate the importance of quality of life to a community's economic development prospects as seen by the community's members. Citizens are well aware about aspects such as neighborhood vitality, safety, community engagement, recreational amenities and educational institutions. Public leaders in those Westside communities need to continue the open conversations about public plans and policies.

Additionally, Westside communities need to assess the impact of their policies with regards to quality of life aspects. As it is right now, the strategic plans

Beaverton and Hillsboro do not provide clear indications about how the stated public policies affect quality of life. Setting out benchmarks and evaluating the impact of policies will provide a basis for further discussions about the effectiveness of policies on quality of life and in turn on the community's economic development.

## 2.0 Trends in Quality of Life Indicators

The Oregon Progress Board has regularly monitors changes in Oregon's quality of life based on a set of benchmarks it has identified as most important to the state. In the past several years, the Progress Board has produced a county-level report on these benchmarks to help counties assess their progress. For each indicator, the Progress Board reports both the most recent values (generally from the year 2000) and historic values for a base year (typically 1990). These reports provide a good indication of the trend in quality of life indicators over the decade of the 1990s. These quality of life indicators fall into five broad areas, including economic well being, social and political indicators, health status, housing and education. We consider each of these indicators in turn.

### Economic Indicators

The Progress Board has identified four principal indicators of economic well-being, including job growth, per capita income, unemployment and poverty. (A fuller examination of Washington County's economy and trends in its performance over the past half century are contained in Technical Memorandum Number 1; we highlight these indicators here as they are those selected by the Progress Board).

Compared to 1990, Washington County's standing in the various economic indicators is mixed. Per capita income has improved relative to the nation (rising from 8 percent above the national average to more than 10 percent above the national average). The net job growth indicator has slowed; principally because 1990 was a year of relatively faster economic growth in Washington County than was calendar year 2000; still Washington County ranked first among Oregon counties in job growth in 2000. Similarly, Washington County's unemployment rate in 1990 was far below the US unemployment rate (the US was in recession; the Portland metropolitan area was not). In 2000, the local unemployment rate was still below the US average, and was the third lowest in the state. The poverty level in Washington County has increased over the past decade, despite robust economic growth, although Washington County's poverty rate is still far below the state and US averages (which are roughly 12-13%).

**Table 16: Economic Indicators for Washington County**

Benchmark	1990	2000	Rank
<b>Net Job Growth</b> (Loss) per 1,000 population	37.1	20.7	1
<b>Income per Capita</b> as percentage of the U.S. per capita income	108.2%	110.5% (1999)	3
<b>Unemployment</b> rate as a percent of U.S. unemployment rate	62.5%	82.5%	2
<b>Poverty</b> (Percent of Oregonians with incomes below the federal poverty level)	6.5%	7.7%	na

(Source: Oregon Progress Board, 2001)

### Political/Social Indicators

The Progress Board compiles a series of social and political indicators for each county. The key measure of political participation, voter turnout, is basically

unchanged over the decade of the 1990s, suggesting that Washington County residents are neither more nor less engaged in the political process than they were a decade ago. The social indicators suggest that there has been a substantial increase in the number of child care slots available in the county and that reported child abuse and neglect is basically unchanged over the past decade. Washington County ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the state for child abuse and neglect, meaning it has the second **lowest** rates of these problems. The fraction of the county's seniors living independently has increased slightly, to nearly 98 percent. The county's overall crime rate has declined slightly, and ranks 7<sup>th</sup> among Oregon counties.

**Table 17: Political/Social Indicators for Washington County**

Benchmark	1990	2000	Rank
<b>Voter participation</b> (Turnout of registered voters in biennial primary elections)	80.2%	80.5%	na
<b>Child Care Availability</b> (Number of child care slots per 100 children under 13)	15	21.2	na
<b>Child Abuse</b> (children abused or neglected per 1,000 persons under 18, )	5.1	5	2
Percentage of <b>seniors living independently</b>	97.0%	97.9% (1999)	na
Overall reported <b>Crimes</b> per 1,000 Residents	87.7	84.6	7

(Source: Oregon Progress Board, 2001)

### Housing Indicators

The Progress Board has fragmentary evidence on the trends in housing in Washington County. One clear trend has been a slight decline in the overall level of homeownership from slightly less than 64 percent in 1980 to slightly less than 61 percent in 2000. Data is not yet available from the 2000 census on the number of cost-burdened lower income homeowners and renters. In 1990, among households with incomes below the county median, about three in five renters and about two in five homeowners paid more than 30 percent of their income for housing.

**Table 18: Housing Indicators for Washington County**

Benchmark	1990	2000	Rank
<b>Home ownership</b> (Percentage of households that are owner occupied)	63.8% (1980)	60.6%	na
<b>Cost burdened renters</b> (Below median income families spending more than 30% of income on housing and utilities)	62.0%	na	na
<b>Cost burdened home owners</b> (Below median income families spending more than 30% of income on housing and utilities)	42.2%	na	na

(Source: Oregon Progress Board, 2001)

The decade of the 1990s has seen a considerable increase in housing prices in the Portland metropolitan area, so it seems likely that affordability trends have worsened. The most recent analysis of housing trends in the county suggests that

one in five households in the county (more than 33,000) lacked affordable housing in 2001. Nearly 7,000 were found to pay more than half their income for housing. Nearly 6,700 households were seen to be at risk for homelessness (Vision West Housing Issue Team 2002)

### Health Indicators

The overall trend in two key health indicators is favorable. The rate of teen pregnancy and the infant mortality rate in Washington County have both declined from their 1980 levels. Washington County ranks somewhat lower in these two categories than it does in economic indicators. Teen pregnancy rates in 2000 were about in the middle of the pack of Oregon counties (17<sup>th</sup> of 36 counties) while infant mortality was in the top fifth of all counties (6<sup>th</sup> of 36).

**Table 19: Health Indicators for Washington County**

Benchmark	1980	2000	Rank
Teen Pregnancy (Pregnancy rate per 1,000 females age 10-17)	18	13.1	17
Infant mortality rate per 1,000	9.9	5.5 (1999)	6

(Source: Oregon Progress Board, 2001)

There are some signs that access to health care in the county, particularly for lower income residents, may be growing more difficult. According to the latest reports on the subject, at least 35,000 working poor in Washington County do not have health insurance, or the resources to purchase primary health care out of pocket. An additional 30,778 county residents are enrolled with the Oregon Health Plan (OHP); an all time high for the county. The economic recession hit Washington County residents earlier than many workers in other parts of the state. OHP eligibility among county residents has increased steadily from 22,586 in January 2000, to 30,778 in November 2001, with a 10% increase in calendar year 2001, alone. Current county OHP enrollment represents the highest county participation since the inception of the Oregon Health Plan in 1994 (Vision West Primary Health Care Team 2002).

### Education Indicators

Washington County shows across the board improvement on all of the key education indicators monitored by the Oregon Progress Board. The fraction of children ready to learn upon entering school is up, dropout rates are down, and roughly 90 percent of the county's adults have completed high school and more than a third have completed four years of college. Although improving, the county's high school dropout rate ranks in the lowest third of all Oregon counties (25<sup>th</sup> of 36 counties). While the Progress Board has not ranked county's educational attainment statistics based on 2000 Census, Washington County has either the highest or second highest level of adult educational attainment of any county in the state.

**Table 20: Education Indicators for Washington County**

<b>Benchmark</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>Rank</b>
<b>Ready-to-learn</b> (Percentage of children entering school ready-to-learn)	62.9% (1997)	71.7%	na
<b>HS dropout rate</b> (grades 9-12 for the listed school year):	6.9% (1989)	5.9%	25
<b>HS degree</b> (Percent of Oregon adults completing HS (or GED))	85% (1980)	88.2% (1990)	na
<b>BA degree</b> (Percent of Oregon adults completing a BA degree or more)	29.8%	36.7%	na

(Source: Oregon Progress Board, 2001)

### 3.0 Relationship between Economy & Quality of Life

Finally, we will examine the inter-relationships between quality of life and the Westside economy. This analysis will be two-fold: First, how do changes in the economy influence key quality of life variables? Second, we take the opposite perspective and consider how quality of life characteristics influence the economy.

#### 3.1 *The Economy's Influence on Quality of Life*

Economic growth has a number of influences on the quality of life in a particular area. Some of the effects are favorable: economic growth generally provides economic opportunities, and actually increases demand for environmental quality. Growth also tends to increase the set of consumption opportunities available to a region's residents. But growth also has important negative effects on quality of life. Growth tends to increase congestion, particularly traffic congestion. Growth is also associated with rising housing prices. In addition, growth represents change, which is always disturbing to some; lowering their perceived quality of life.

While some of the effects of economic growth on quality of life are deterministic, many of the effects can vary based on the kind of economic growth a region influences. In addition, the negative effects of economic growth on quality of life can be ameliorated by good public policies or exacerbated by bad ones.

In addition because quality of life is so multi-faceted, and because different people place different values on the various facets of quality of life, some people may perceive an improvement in quality of life in association with economic growth, while others perceive deterioration. Clearly, Oregonians are very divided on the question of whether, on balance, economic growth has been good or bad for the state (See page 5). It is likely that even in the future opinion will be divided on the question of whether growth improved or worsened our quality of life.

Economic growth has a number of influences on the quality of life in a particular area. Some of the effects are favorable: economic growth generally provides economic opportunities, and actually increases demand for environmental quality. Growth also tends to increase the set of consumption opportunities available to a region's residents. But growth also has important negative effects on quality of life. Growth tends to increase congestion, particularly traffic congestion. Growth is also associated with rising housing prices. In addition, growth represents change, which is always disturbing to some; lowering their perceived quality of life.

**Economic Opportunity:** Growth expands the range of economic opportunities available to the residents of the region. In Washington County, the number of jobs has more than doubled since 1987, and, in fact, the county's share of regional employment has increased far faster than its share of regional population. Many of the jobs have been in the high paid high technology sector, resulting in an increase in average wages, which are now higher than in other

parts of the region. (See Technical Memorandum: The Westside Economy for details). Economic growth has also created substantial opportunities for entrepreneurship. The number of businesses in the county has more than tripled in the past twenty-five years, from about 3,500 to more than 13,000. Prosperity in Washington County has maintained the relatively high incomes in the county: median household income in 2000 was more than \$54,500, well above the national, state and regional averages.

While economic opportunities have increased in Washington County, growth has not necessarily made everyone better off. The county has a mix of extremely well paid jobs and some very low paid jobs. Poverty rates in the county have increased slightly since 1990. Moreover, there is no guarantee that additional growth (more jobs and population) will result in any increase in the real incomes of the region's residents. Nationally, there has been little correlation between aggregate growth and improvements in real income. Metropolitan Portland is one of the US areas that according to one study, has grown rapidly but experienced below average income growth (adjusted for local inflation) over the past decade (Gottlieb 2002).

**Demand for environmental quality.** Economic growth tends to increase the demands that residents have for environmental quality. There is a strong correlation between income levels and support for environmental quality. In a sense, environmentalism is a luxury good, demand increases as income grows (Thurow 1999). Internationally, wealthy nations are much stronger supporters of environmental policies than poorer ones. Within the US, higher income groups are more supportive of environmental controls. In addition, as incomes rise, support for environmental protection increases. Higher incomes may be part of the explanation for higher levels of support for some land use policies in Washington County than in other parts of the region (see page 9). It is likely that as the Westside economy continues to grow, and as national, state and local incomes increase, demand for environmental quality will increase as well.

**Expanded consumption opportunities.** One effect of economic growth is to expand the range of consumption opportunities available to a region's residents. As growth increases the total population of a metropolitan area the number and variety of local businesses that the region can support increases as well. Larger metropolitan areas offer their residents a wider array of shops, services, restaurants, entertainment and other goods than smaller areas. The growing range of choices available to residents arguably improves well-being (Cox and Alm 1998). Growth enables a wider range of publicly provided opportunities as well, including regional facilities like convention centers, concert halls, sports facilities and the like.

**Congestion:** Expanding regional population tends to increase congestion particularly traffic congestion. As one authoritative review of travel patterns in US metropolitan areas observed, as a region's population increases, traffic congestion tends to worsen (Texas Transportation Institute, 2001). This may be particularly the case in the fastest growing portions of a metropolitan area. Public opinion data clearly indicate that Westside residents view traffic congestion as a more serious problem than do other residents of the Portland metropolitan area (see page 11).

Traffic congestion is the most obvious and emblematic of the kinds of congestion that can result from growth, but congestion is likely in many aspects of

metropolitan life. Any resource that is in relatively fixed supply, or which grows more slowly than the regional economy—everything from parks and open space, to theatre seats and restaurants—is potentially susceptible to congestion.

The tendency toward congestion as a result of growth can be affected by a number of factors, including the location of growth in relation to the capacity of the transportation system. Over time, congestion may be self-limiting as a region's residents adjust their housing locations to minimize the costs imposed by traffic congestion (Downs 2001). This mechanism of coping with congestion, however, may tend to have the effect of segmenting a region's housing and labor markets.

**Housing prices.** Studies of housing price fluctuations in the Portland metropolitan area have concluded that the periods of rapid price inflation were closely correlated with periods of rapid economic growth in the region (Nelson, Pendall et al. 2002). Whether housing prices will be higher in the long run as a result of growth is unclear. Higher housing prices tend to elicit the construction of more new housing in fast growing areas, and this additional supply moderates future housing price inflation (Glaeser and Gyourko 2001). Indeed, housing prices in the Portland metropolitan area, which were rising faster than in the nation as a whole during the early 1990s, have risen more slowly than the rest of the nation in the past few years. Over the past five years, housing prices in Portland have increased about 25.7 percent, substantially less than the 36.1 percent increase recorded nationally (Office of Federal Housing Enterprise Oversight 2002).

**Environmental impacts:** There are many environmental impacts associated with growth. Additional employment and population generally bring with them additional water runoff and non-point source water pollution, additional air pollution from added traffic, the loss of open spaces (Hirschhorn 2000). Some of these effects are directly influenced by population increase (such as demand for additional wastewater treatment), but other environmental effects can be mitigated through pollution control measures or changes in land use patterns.

**Change:** There is some evidence that change itself is perceived as burdensome by some segment of the population, and that almost by definition, growth causes a deterioration in the quality of life. The underlying economic argument is that people are mobile and have chosen to live in a metropolitan area of a particular size and with particular characteristics; if that metropolitan area changes (say grows larger) then they end up in a different, less than optimal, size of area than they wanted to be in (Gottlieb 2002). Long time residents of Oregon, for example, have somewhat different views about the optimal way of handling growth; about a third of those who have lived in the state ten years or less regard concentrating growth in existing cities and protecting undeveloped areas as very desirable, while less than a quarter of those who have lived in the state 10 years or more agree that this is very desirable (Davis and Hibbitts 1996).

### ***3.2 Quality of Life and Its Influence on the Economy***

While changes in the economy have important impacts on the quality of life in an area, so to do changes in quality of life variables influence the economy. The importance of quality of life to the economy is not simply a local issue; economists are increasingly finding that quality of life considerations are key to

regional economic success. We analyzed the scholarly literature on these questions as part of our review of strategies for a knowledge-based economy (See Project Technical Memorandum: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Economic Strategy.)

The key findings of our earlier analysis can be summarized as follows: Distinctive local characteristics and amenities are in effect a supplement to the real income of individuals living in particular places. Because workers, especially younger, highly educated workers are mobile, they tend to be drawn to places with a high quality of life. A good quality of life can help improve and maintain the local labor force and may be particularly attractive to firms seeking knowledge workers. This trend represents something of a reversal of our traditional view of economic development in which workers moved to follow firms. Increasingly, the evaluation of economic development programs success is expressed not just in terms of traditional economic measures, but also in whether it measurably improves local quality of life (Erickcek 1996). Quality of life has been widely cited by local high technology firms as a reason that they have located in the Portland metropolitan area, and subsequently expanded their operations here (Cortright and Mayer 2000). The popular conception of the importance of quality of life to migration is borne out by careful surveys. A majority of those moving to metropolitan Portland in 1993 reported that amenities were a key part of their decision, and amenities were cited more frequently than jobs as an attraction; 48 percent of those moving to metro Portland had a four-year degree or higher level of education (Judson, et al, 1999).

A number of economic studies have examined the kinds of amenities that contribute most the perception of quality of life. They include many of the aspects of livability that Oregonians cherish, particularly access to outdoor recreation and natural beauty, as well as more metropolitan and cultural assets like a local music scene, good schools, museums, theatres and festivals.

There are important interactions between quality of life and social conditions as well. Highly educated people tend to marry other highly educated people and these “power couples” tend to be concentrated in larger metropolitan areas. In addition, there seems to be a strong correlation between measures of tolerance—for example the fraction of the population that is gay—and the growth of high technology. These factors, coupled with continued increases in average incomes point to a tendency for the quality of life to become an increasingly important factor in the location of knowledge workers, and in turn, the industries which seek access to such persons.

The implication of this analysis is that developing and maintaining a distinctive quality of life is likely to be an essential component to a knowledge-based development strategy. Places with a poor or deteriorating quality of life will find it difficult to attract workers and firms, will be weak at innovation, and will find themselves falling further behind. In contrast, those places that develop a distinctive and improving quality of life will be at an advantage in assembling and retaining the knowledge workers on which prosperity increasingly depends.

## 4.0 Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that there has been a strong inter-relationship between the Westside's livability and its economic growth. There are four key observations of importance to the region's leaders.

### ***4.1 Many aspects of quality of life are subjective and personal***

Different people put different weights on the various aspects of quality of life. Perceptions of quality of life vary substantially between long-time residents and recent migrants to the metropolitan area, among those in different income groups, and those with different political philosophies or personal beliefs. Consequently, quality of life is not ever likely to be defined in a single coherent fashion. Quality of life cannot be measured with the precision that we attach to other variables. Nonetheless, there are opportunities to use quality of life to help guide public policy. Where there is broad collective agreement on the attributes that constitute quality of life in a given community, these should be incorporated into planning and decision making (Myers 1988).

Public policies make trade offs among quality of life indicators. In part because there is no single or definitive statement of quality of life, it falls to public leaders to articulate and define the community's or the region's collective judgment as to the priorities it sets for quality of life.

### ***4.2 Washington County residents are confident about their economic future but troubled by congestion, and are supportive of compact growth.***

Our analysis of planning documents, public policies and public opinion polling data indicate that there are broad areas of public agreement on what constitutes the major aspects of the Westside region's quality of life. Westside residents identify the region's natural beauty, recreational opportunities and a commitment to environmental protection as key aspects of what constitutes their quality of life. For the most part, these values are indistinguishable from those expressed by other Oregonians and other residents of the Portland metropolitan area. There are some important differences. Residents of Washington County have expressed a stronger than average commitment to compact growth objectives (concentrating development in existing developed areas) and the protection of undeveloped areas. Washington County residents are also much more likely than other residents of the metropolitan area to regard traffic congestion as a serious problem, notwithstanding the fact that their commutes are somewhat shorter, on average, than those of other residents of the metropolitan area. The data also show that county residents overwhelmingly regard the Westside's recent growth as positive, and that despite the weak economic performance of the past year, are very optimistic about their future economic outlook.

### ***4.3 Continued economic growth will likely widen consumption opportunities, but increase congestion and competition for finite resources.***

We have found a strong two-way relationship between quality of life and the region's economy. Consistent with recent economic theories, the region's quality of life has been a major stimulus to economic development. Westside livability has been a principal asset in attracting and retaining talented workers, and in turn fostering the success of firms that start and expand in the Westside. The Westside's quality of life has been strongly influenced by economic growth. Growth has expanded opportunities to find jobs and start businesses in the Westside, and has helped expand the range of consumption opportunities in the region. Economic growth and higher incomes have, as elsewhere, been associated with greater demands for environmental protection and improvement. The principal drawback to the region's livability, from the standpoint of residents, has been an exacerbation of traffic congestion, which is perceived to be worse in the Westside than elsewhere in the region.

### ***4.4 Westside leaders should work to explicitly define what they believe represents the community consensus quality of life***

Because quality of life is in part a subjective determination, and because the most important and actionable aspects of quality of life are those on which there is broad social agreement, it seems logical that quality of life ought to be addressed in an explicit and measurable way by the government leaders of the Westside. Quality of life is a key facet of the region's economic attractiveness, and so such measures would be an integral part of a Westside or regional economic strategy.

This adoption of clear quality of life indicators is becoming a best practice in regional economic development strategies. In San Jose, California, for example the region has developed an annual Index of Silicon Valley which describes the region's well-being in terms of 14 economic indicators and 15 quality of life indicators (Henton, Melville et al. 1996). Much of the framework and precedent for this style of measurement comes from the Oregon Progress Board's Oregon Benchmarks, which earned one of the Kennedy School of Government's prestigious awards for best practice in state and local government.

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