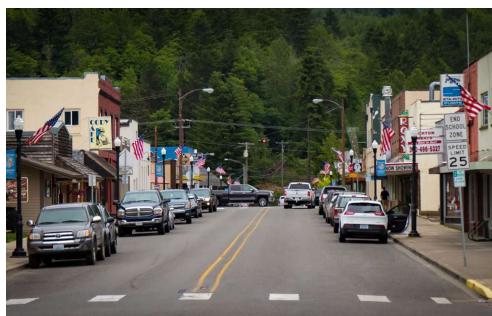




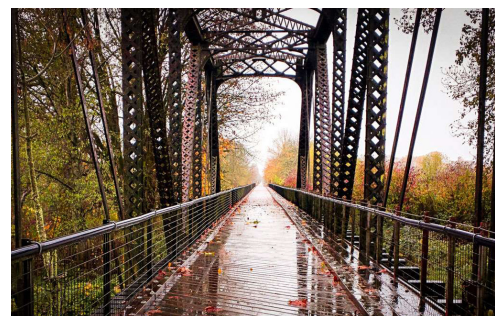
# Lewis County



Packwood Lake



Downtown Morton



Willapa Trail

COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIC PLAN 2020-2025  
FOR LEWIS COUNTY, WASHINGTON

OCTOBER 2020

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Message from the County Commissioners .....	3
Meet Lewis County .....	4
The Strategic Planning Process .....	5
Lewis County Vision 2025 .....	8
The Primary Directive of Lewis County .....	9
Strategic Directive 1 - Economic Development .....	11
Strategic Directive 2 - Housing & Proactive Growth .....	12
Strategic Directive 3 - Public Health & Social Services .....	13
Strategic Directive 4 - Fiscal Sustainability & Organizational Efficiency.....	14
Strategic Directive 5 - Public Safety .....	15
Implementation of the Plan .....	16
Special Thanks .....	17



# Message from the County Commissioners

We take great pleasure in presenting Lewis County's five-year, community-based vision and strategic plan. Many hours have been invested in its creation, most of which were offered by volunteer residents with a desire to contribute to the future of our community.

In creating this plan, we were careful to set up a process that would be driven by residents rather than elected officials or County staff. We'd like to personally thank the members of our Strategic Planning Advisory Committee. They gathered resident surveys and conducted 20 different community meetings throughout the County, giving residents a chance to share their thoughts about the future of our community and where to best focus our efforts as a County. Residents from all areas of the County collectively contributed hundreds of hours to the creation of this plan.

The committee reviewed written survey responses information from hundreds of residents and evaluated feedback from additional hundreds more who participated directly in community dialogue sessions. Thank you to those who took this opportunity to share their thoughts!

This plan will serve as a guide for County staff and elected officials over the coming years as we consider how to best allocate the resources entrusted to us by our residents. While many elements identified in the plan reflect long-standing efforts and do not represent a drastic shift in the County's overall strategy, this plan will guide us in focusing our efforts as a County and will form the basis of our annual budgeting process.

We are committed to using the resources entrusted to us to advance the priorities identified in the document that follows. Imagine the future we can create if we unite our efforts in advancing those things that our residents have identified as most important! We look forward to joining with you in building that future.



*Edna J. Fund  
District 1*



*Bobby Jackson  
District 2*



*Gary Stamper  
District 3*

*Lewis County Board of Commissioners*



# Meet Lewis County

Created in 1845, Lewis County has a rich history of exploration and discovery. Named after Meriwether Lewis, Lewis County has maintained a spirit of adventure through the decades. Located halfway between Seattle and Portland, Lewis County is the premier location in Southwest Washington and remains a gateway to the great outdoors of Western Washington. Lewis County is the ideal destination for any adventure-seeker looking to enjoy outdoor recreation, thanks to its countless hunting and fishing locations and hiking and biking trails. Mount Rainier and Mount St. Helens offer majestic views and opportunities for those searching to connect with nature. When someone imagines the beauty to be experienced in the Pacific Northwest, sites throughout Lewis County help make those dreams a reality.

The County is also home to a wide array of economic opportunities. Once dependent upon the coal and timber industries, Lewis County has gradually diversified to support travel and recreation, to increase medical service providers, to expand several logistics companies and to maximize trade through an inland port. Additionally, Lewis County offers various opportunities to consumers and employers. With locally-owned stores and boutiques as well as national chains and outlets in the Twin Cities of Centralia and Chehalis, residents and guests enjoy a personal shopping experience with more options than any community in the region.

Lewis County is at a crossroads ripe with opportunity. The area's growing population is excited and eager to discover the continual success that lies ahead. That success will be derived from a respect for the work that made the County what it is today, increased capital investment and building development, and a community dedicated to exploring the frontier ahead. The residents of Lewis County are passionate, hard-working and resilient. The people here care deeply about the County's well-being and image. They desire to have community seen the way they see it: a summation of the natural beauty this world has to offer, a place where people can realize their limitless potential and, most of all, home.



Mount Rainier





# The Strategic Planning Process

The central purpose in this undertaking was to provide Lewis County with a tool that can be used by elected officials and County staff to guide goal-setting and to focus efforts on those things that residents and visitors have identified as their highest priorities. In order to truly be effective, this plan needs to become part of how elected officials and County staff operate and think about programs and services. Ultimately, the plan needs to be incorporated into how success is measured in detailed operating plans and regular County business. No matter how comprehensive this plan is, its usefulness will be defined by how effective the County leverages it in guiding decisions and creating the future to which residents aspire.

## Methodology

The Lewis County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) determined the need to bring focus to spending priorities while addressing the needs of the residents of Lewis County. Key to this endeavor was the creation of a community strategic plan. In line with an approach used by countless communities across the country, the BOCC determined that such an initiative, if it were to survive and become truly useful to the community, would need to be a community initiative driven by residents.

The Commissioners appointed a committee of resident volunteers, known as the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC), to drive the strategic planning process. The strategic planning process began with SPAC meetings with staff and Commission members to define expectations and understand community priorities. These meetings also assisted the committee in identifying critical stakeholder groups that should be engaged during the strategic planning process.

The methodologies used by the SPAC to engage the public included the following:

- Community dialogue sessions.
- Stakeholder focus group meetings.
- Resident surveys.
- Business meetings.
- Interviews with community leaders.
- Announcements at special events.
- Dedicated website for the public to submit feedback.



# The Strategic Planning Process



Larry McGee



Peggy Hammer



Joe Clark

## *Lewis County Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC)*

Stakeholder meetings were held with business groups, service clubs, civic and charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, neighborhood groups, high school students, and a host of others. The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC) held an open house and invited the public to help generate community priorities and ideas that would eventually form the basis for the strategic directives outlined in this plan. Surveys were administered through the County website as well as distributed to County email groups, volunteers and community event attendees. A separate survey was distributed solely in Spanish to ensure representation from the residents more comfortable expressing their views in that language. The process of gathering stakeholder input took over four months.

In all, the committee was able to gather 450 survey responses and synthesize that input into clear priorities. Almost 300 individuals participated in the 20 stakeholder meetings and community dialogue sessions. Participants in the process were able to provide the SPAC with information related to key initiatives and improvements they wanted to see implemented in the plan.



At the end of this process, the SPAC began to synthesize the thousands of pieces of information gathered from residents into more specific focus areas, or “strategic directives.” Ultimately, five strategic directives were produced. As the SPAC volunteers collaborated with staff on addressing resident feedback, they observed that the County is already engaged in significant initiatives that address many resident priorities. In light of that observation, several initiatives in the plan state to continue efforts conducted by the County, with the expectation that communicating and increasing public awareness of the work the County is doing will be a guiding principal moving forward. The committee, utilizing these community priorities, then collaborated with County staff to produce specific strategic initiatives associated with each focus area. The final plan was adopted by the Board of County Commissioners in November 2020. It will stand as a guiding document for the County until 2025.

# The Strategic Planning Process

Below are some quotes and a word cloud gathered from the resident surveys:

*“I believe the county is doing its best to accommodate the influx of people moving from the metropolitan areas to our rural towns. The county is expanding its economic opportunities by allowing bigger companies to move in. This increases jobs opportunities within the area and helps struggling community members succeed.”*

*“I think Lewis County is doing well in their efforts to see things in a different way, and to start thinking that maybe change is not as bad as some think.”*

What is the government of Lewis County doing well?



# Lewis County Vision 2025



## Explanation and Definition of Key Strategic Plan Elements

In the process of examining this strategic plan, the reader will encounter various terms and phrases associated with key elements of the plan. It is important to understand the strategic plan within the context of what these elements are intended to contribute.

### **Primary Directive**

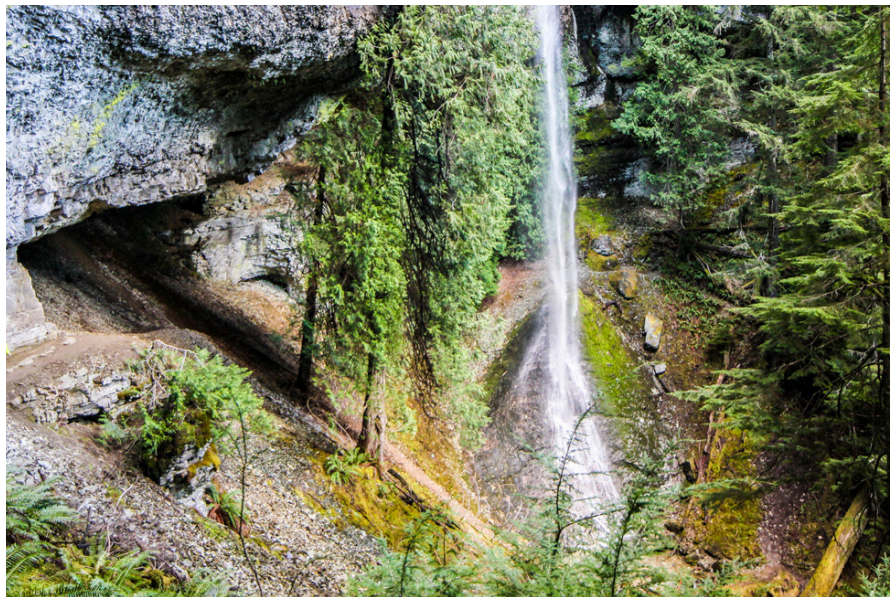
This is a statement that clearly describes the County's rationale for existing. It is the product of what we in Lewis County are passionate about, where our competencies lie, and what we believe provides the means to realize our community vision. The Primary Directive represents the highest-level directive, serving as the hub of the plan to which all other strategic directives are attached.

### **Strategic Directives**

This plan contains five strategic directives. A strategic directive is a very high-level priority that is articulated in a way that effectively describes a community priority. Directives are not intended to describe specific initiatives, ideas, programs or services. They merely capture in a very general way what residents believe is most important in Lewis County.

### **Strategic Initiatives**

Each strategic directive is accompanied by several strategic initiatives that assist in bringing the directive to the level of application. In other words, strategic initiatives are more specific actions, programs, and ideas designed to bring about the realization of the strategic directives. A directive is a destination, and the initiatives represent the route that will enable us to arrive at our destination.



**Cathedral Falls**





# The Primary Directive of Lewis County

The primary purpose of government is to provide a foundation for civilized living. While this concept may appear elementary and more than intuitive, much debate in recent years has swirled around the role of government. It is therefore critical that, before presenting the community strategic direction, the County define its role in the lives of its residents. We do this by formulating and articulating the Primary Directive of Lewis County.

This is the central reason for why Lewis County exists. It lies at the intersection of three things:

1. **What are we deeply passionate about:** Why do we come to work every day? What motivates us? Why do we care about what happens in Lewis County?
2. **What makes us the best in the world:** Are we uniquely positioned to do something extraordinary? What are we equipped to accomplish? This is a question of not only what we can do, but what we can do better than others.
3. **What drives our economic or our resource engine:** What needs to happen in order to empower us to realize this primary directive?

Lewis County's Primary Directive:

**Build upon our location, resiliency, and strong sense of community to offer future generations the opportunity to build a life for themselves in this beautiful environment that we are fortunate to call home.**



# The Primary Directive of Lewis County

## ***What are we deeply passionate about?***

In Lewis County, we have a passion for elevating and sustaining quality of life. We understand completely the sacred trust that is ours: to maximize our residents' investment by supporting those programs, initiatives, and ideas that will provide an opportunity for all to live the life they dreamed of when they first came here. We believe that our passionate commitment to our community vision and values, combined with careful planning and purposeful follow-through, will translate into opportunities for every resident.

## ***What makes us the best in the world?***

With our rural location halfway between Portland and Seattle, Lewis County is uniquely positioned to build a community that enables a truly vibrant and unique quality of life for our residents. Enjoying life in a beautiful, rural environment that is simultaneously close to two major U.S. cities allows residents to enjoy the best of both city and rural life. Our strong sense of hard work is evident and enables all residents to take ownership in contributing to the success of the community.

## ***What drives our economic and resource engines?***

We believe that as we lift our residents' quality of life, we will have demonstrated our competency and trustworthiness. As we demonstrate these qualities, we will generate trust from our residents. As our residents' trust increases, they are more likely to continue to invest in the services that we provide. As they invest in the community, we are empowered to continue lifting our level of service, which results in greater trust -- the process repeats itself. Public trust drives Lewis County's resource engine.

All programs, initiatives, and energy must therefore be focused on achieving the Primary Directive. All metrics and outcomes should support this Primary Directive. The strategic plan's role in fulfilling the Primary Directive begins by defining what residents believe is essential to quality of life. As a precursor to developing the strategic plan, the Strategic Planning Advisory Committee was able to identify five factors that residents believe need to be emphasized to improve the quality of life in Lewis County.

These equally important factors are:

1. Economic Development
2. Housing & Proactive Growth
3. Public Health & Social Services
4. Fiscal Sustainability & Organizational Efficiency
5. Public Safety



# Strategic Directive 1

## Economic Development



Downtown Centralia

*“I want to live in a community where there are well-paying employment opportunities that allow me to provide for my family.”*

Lewis County has experienced significant reconfiguration and growth in economic development over the years. However, the County faces challenges that impede continued economic growth and business recruitment. The most impactful of these challenges include: a lack of reliable high-speed internet in an age where telecommuting capabilities are almost essential, flood risks that deter businesses from building in the County, lagging infrastructure investments to enable a smooth transition for new businesses, responsive wage and job growth, and spreading the benefits of growth throughout the community. Critical to success in every other area of the strategic plan is the imperative to foster growth-minded economic development and expand the economic base of the County through business recruitment and development. By addressing these hurdles the County will enable this highly needed economic development to quicken.

### Potential Initiatives:

- Increase partnership with the Lewis County Economic Development Council (EDC) and other local agencies and businesses to recruit new businesses to Lewis County
- Expand access to reliable, high-speed internet across the County
- Reduce hurdles for permitting and building
- Implement identified flood mitigation projects that are currently under County jurisdiction
- Continue educating local and state partners to address flood mitigation
- Coordinate with Centralia College, high schools and local businesses to develop an adaptable workforce, providing education and training opportunities that allow the regional workforce to expand into areas of market demand (green technologies, logistics, manufacturing, etc.)
- Improve infrastructure to facilitate economic development and prepare for future needs (water, roads, schools, emergency services, etc.)
- Continue to leverage natural assets of Lewis County to attract tourism and host festivals and local events

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Growth in median wage
- Job growth
- Increased gross domestic product (GDP)
- Increased tax base and revenue growth through higher economic activity
- Metrics for high-speed internet accessibility
- Number of flood mitigation projects completed
- Reduced number of internet dark spots

# Strategic Directive 2

## Housing & Proactive Growth



*“I want to live in a place where my children can one day find a place to raise their families. A place that is proactive in addressing the challenges associated with growth.”*

Barrier Dam (South of Salkum)

Perhaps the factor most impeding growth in Lewis County is the lack of available and affordable housing. With vacancy rates currently less than 1%, the County’s housing stock is scarce, both for younger County residents wanting to form households here and for those desiring to move to the County. This lack of housing also impedes businesses from relocating to the County, due to the inability to house existing workers of various wage levels. With a continually growing population, it is essential that proper planning be put in place before this growth occurs. The County must partner with various municipalities in the area to create planning models that can accommodate growth without crushing the communities’ capacity to manage it. The County will support smaller cities by assisting with permitting and zoning requests to expedite housing projects. Within the County government itself, staff will work to reduce unnecessary hurdles and red tape that delay or deter housing developments. Where possible, the County will also leverage existing Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and expanding UGAs to enable more housing supply, while also avoiding disruption to the rural quality of life that many current residents highly value. Through these efforts, Lewis County can impact housing supply, which will in turn enable continued growth and economic development, opening the County up as a place for young families.

### Potential Initiatives:

- Partner with city and county staff to assist with workload of key residential permitting and zoning requests
- Design/develop countywide growth planning model that is acceptable to smaller municipalities
- Continue to streamline zoning, permitting and building processes
- Increase collaboration and partnership between County and cities on residential permitting
- Leverage resident perspective in an inclusive process to develop consistent policies regarding code enforcement for housing
- Establish a task force to identify and designate additional growth areas and make recommendations for zoning changes to foster development
- Leverage and expand existing Urban Growth Areas to enable future residential building
- Designate additional Urban Growth Areas to enable future residential building

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Increase in annual residential permits issued
- Increased vacancy rate due to increased housing stock
- Additional growth areas identified and/or rezoned
- Improved efficiency of zoning, permitting, and building processes, as measured by turnaround times.
- Existence of a county-wide growth planning model



# Strategic Directive 3

## Public Health & Social Services



Carlisle Lake

*“I want to live in a community that facilitates growth and healthy living in the lives of its residents. Where people can be accountable, find the support they need, to become self-reliant members of the community.”*

Lewis County is working to appropriately address the challenges of homelessness, mental health, and the rising costs in serving those in need. Consistent with Lewis County’s values of limited and efficient government, and empowering its residents to develop personal accountability, the County will expand its partnership with faith-based organizations, schools, and local businesses and nonprofits to address these challenges. The County will continue to utilize its Drug Court to assist addicts on their road to recovery, and Family and Juvenile Courts to help at-risk residents attain a more peaceful life at home. Lastly, the County will discuss how to effectively serve residents of the County who are in need of assistance, given the fiscal realities the County government must operate under. This discussion will revolve around social determinants of health, or rather, unmet needs that directly lead to the issues of homelessness, drug abuse and public vagrancy. By proactively addressing these root cause issues within the community, the County will avoid the high reactionary costs that plague the cities of Portland and Seattle, and assist its residents to get back on their feet and become contributing members of the community.

### **Potential Initiatives:**

- Expand partnership with faith-based organizations, schools, and the private sector to address homelessness and build self-reliance
- Continue to utilize and support the Lewis County Drug, Family, and Juvenile Courts to build accountability for those in need
- Implement Lewis County Public Health & Social Services strategic plan for housing & homelessness
- Identify and establish shared goals in addressing social determinants of health

### **What Does Success Look Like?**

- Decrease in calls to emergency response services regarding homeless
- Decreased homelessness amongst Lewis County residents from Lewis County (based on point-in-time counts)
- Increased utilization rate of existing resources and services
- Increase in efficiency and access to services (turnaround times)
- Other input and outcome metrics based upon feedback from county public health department to be determined

# Strategic Directive 4

## Fiscal Sustainability & Organizational Efficiency



*“I want to live in a community where the local government uses my tax dollars wisely. One where they continually seek ways to improve and better serve its residents.”*

Lewis County Historic Courthouse

Unfunded mandates from the state, regulations and inflationary costs of infrastructure, public safety and other core services have caused expenses to increase each year. These rising costs, coupled with dwindling revenue growth, create an increasingly difficult financial situation to manage. To put it boldly, the current financial trajectory of the County is not sustainable. In response, the County will convene necessary conversations to secure long-term funding for core services. The County will also work to improve its internal operations and organizational structure. This includes properly defining the roles and responsibilities of the Board of Commissioners and the County Manager to enable efficient management of day-to-day operations, while keeping an eye toward strategic opportunities that surface in the future. By realistically mitigating fiscal restraints while working to broaden the tax base through business recruitment and economic growth, the County will demonstrate its commitment to increase public trust by demonstrating fiscal responsibility and wisely spending money on those things that residents prioritize the most.

### Potential Initiatives:

- Continue to seek active resident engagement in the budget process
- Follow best practices for budgeting to maintain fiscal stability
- Focus county efforts on the essential functions of government to ensure the best use of public funds
- Explore bonding initiative for proposed capital projects, including but not limited to a new juvenile detention facility
- Recruit businesses to spur economic development and expand the tax base (see “Economic Development” on Page 11)
- Codify County Manager position into County leadership structure
- Continue to provide high-quality employee training on a regular basis (HR trainings, leadership speakers, etc.)
- Leverage Lean management principles to evaluate the efficiency of all departments
- Continue to develop HR and Risk programs that add value to County government employees and employers alike

### What Does Success Look Like?

- Expansion of commercial property tax base
- Adherence to budget best practices of the Government Finance Officials Association
- Follow-up meetings are conducted with the Residents’ Budget Committee
- Additional success metrics TBD



# Strategic Directive 5

## Public Safety



Chehalis River

*“I want to live in a community that is safe; where law enforcement know that they have the support they need to succeed.”*

The residents of Lewis County hold members of law enforcement in deep regard. Consistent with that regard and respect is the commitment to supply these individuals with the resources and support they need to succeed in keeping the community safe. Lewis County will invest in its Sheriff’s Office so that it can continue to provide “Public Safety through Professional Service.” As part of that investment, the County will maintain funding levels for its Sheriff’s Office, and will pursue additional revenue sources to secure the long-term infrastructure needs of its public safety network and workers. The County will also strive to alleviate the burdens caused by growing public health challenges, such as mental health, homelessness, and drug addiction. The Sheriff’s Office will continue to work with local agencies across the County on coordinated processes so that those struggling with mental health, drug addiction, domestic violence, child abuse, and other public safety challenges are consistently connected to the social services they so desperately need in order to break the cycles of recidivism. Residents admire and respect law enforcement, and by appropriately supplying coordinated resources and support to our Sheriff’s Office and other local public safety agencies, the County can help place our public safety professionals in a position to succeed.

### **Potential Initiatives:**

- Maintain funding level for Sheriff’s Office
- Explore bonding initiative for juvenile detention facility
- Partner with local law enforcement agencies on coordinated processes when dealing with local homeless and/or mentally ill to connect these individuals to local services
- Expand community policing, de-escalation, bias and other important training efforts
- Continue NaphCare medical services for County Jail to address health challenges and reduce recidivism
- Invest in the modernization of needed public safety infrastructure and equipment (radios, 911 dispatch, updating fleet of vehicles, jail, etc.)
- Assist in the implementation of the Sheriff’s Office Strategic Plan

### **What Does Success Look Like?**

- Reduced recidivism rate within Lewis County
- Reduce/replace aging fleet and other essential public safety equipment
- Coordination of public safety processes shared between Sheriff’s Office and local law public safety agencies
- Other input and outcome metrics based upon evolving public safety standards
- Work toward Jail accreditation



# Implementation of the Plan

Simply having a plan does not ensure its implementation. The County should take specific measures to implement this strategic plan and measure progress toward its realization. Specifically, the County should:

- Utilize this plan as the basis for annual strategic planning, goal setting and budgeting.
- Annually establish and review outcome measures associated with strategic plan directives. Make adjustments as necessary to ensure close correlation between outcome measures and plan directives.
- Create a community scorecard for County and resident use. This should be in a highly illustrative format, accessible electronically via the County's website. The site should provide data associated with previously identified outcome measures. It is critical that this information is kept as current as possible.
- Under the direction of the County Manager, annually provide the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) and departmental decision-makers with a County business plan that ties BOCC goals to strategic directives, identifying critical outcomes, measures, objectives and expected budget impacts.
- Enable the SPAC to conduct semi-annual follow-ups with County staff on strategic plan implementation progress and impacts and report high-level findings to the BOCC.



Covell Creek Falls



# Special Thanks

The strategic planning process and composition is a broad-based community endeavor. Generally speaking, the broader the base of community participation, the greater the survivability of the plan. In Lewis County, this was definitely a broad-based community effort. The County expresses its appreciation to several individuals and groups that made this initiative possible. Special thanks to:

- The Strategic Planning Advisory Committee (SPAC): Peggy Hammer, Joe Clark and Larry McGee.
- The Twin Cities Rotary Club, Winlock Senior Center, Lewis County Sheriff's Department, Providence Centralia Hospital, Chehalis Troops for the Boy Scouts of America, Onalaska Alliance, Lewis County Realtor's Association, United Way of Lewis County Board of Directors, American Association of University Women, the Port of Chehalis, Twin City Sertoma, Lewis County Democrats, Lewis County Republicans, Centralia City College, the Industrial Commission, the business community of Packwood, Lewis County Public Health and Social Services Department, Lewis County nonprofits and Lewis County Employees.
- Paulette Eaton, Dr. Kevin Caserta, Lynn Sodergren, Mark Fast, Todd Mason, Joe Voetberg, Alicia Bull, Lindsay Giberson, Kathy Tennyson, Matt Matayoshi and countless other individuals.
- The residents of Lewis County, without whose participation this plan would not be possible.
- Dan Griffiths and Mackey Smith – Tanner LLC, public sector consulting, for the facilitation of the strategic planning process and the production of the strategic plan.
- Pictures were provided by Discover Lewis County. [discoverlewiscounty.com](http://discoverlewiscounty.com)



Mount St. Helens