Highlights from the 2014 survey of southwest Washington residents’ values and beliefs
Southwest Washington is characterized by its centuries-old landmarks, rich cultural heritage, and natural beauty. Residents of our region—more than 500,000 voices strong—are equally unique. A broad palette of values, beliefs, and priorities shape our way of life in southwest Washington, which has been defined both by residents’ strong commonalities and striking distinctions.

In order to get where we want to go, it’s important to know where we stand. Step one? Take the pulse of our residents—from vibrant small towns and rural areas, to bustling city centers—to understand what they care about most. A group of local community organizations and individuals initiated this survey of southwest Washingtonians in Clark, Cowlitz, and Skamania counties for their views on more than a dozen topics that influence our present and future. More than 2,000 residents¹ participated by phone and online in this first stage of an ongoing campaign to gather input from people across the region. This is what our region is saying.²

¹ The scientific survey involved 673 people (a representative cross-section of the southwest Washington community) who answered questions by phone and online. Another 1,364 people participated in the online public engagement survey. DHM Research, an independent and nonpartisan firm, conducted both portions of this study from April to August 2014.

² All of the percentages in this summary are derived from the scientific survey results.
Our welcoming community

Southwest Washingtonians value friendliness and neighborliness above all

From a holistic view of community issues, to strong support for education and enhanced job training through economic development, the 500,000 Voices survey revealed diverse views across southwest Washington. The region’s friendliness and neighborliness emerged as the top value. Protecting the environment, conserving the area’s natural resources, and encouraging healthier lifestyles also stand out as high priorities for residents. Overall, the people of our region share a sense of optimism regarding what’s on the horizon.

What do you value most about living in your community?³

- **29%** Friendliness/neighborliness
- **14%** Safety/public safety
- **12%** Beauty/scenery
- **12%** Small community
- **8%** Quiet/peaceful
- **5%** Proximity to bigger cities (Seattle, Portland, etc.)
- **5%** Weather/climate
- **4%** Education system
- **4%** Rural area
- **4%** Environment—general
- **3%** Proximity to restaurants/bars/shopping/entertainment
- **3%** Outdoors/outdoor activities

³ These figures do not include respondents who answered “None/Nothing” and “Don’t know”; therefore, total percentages do not add up to 100%.

“Southwest Washington is known for its parks and open spaces, friendly neighbors, and clean air.”

—FEMALE, CLARK
Residents differ on top priorities for government action

When asked which issue is most important for government to tackle, 12% chose economy/jobs, followed closely by road infrastructure, government spending/taxation, and crime/public safety. Government leadership, poverty, healthcare, and traffic concerns each weighed in at 5% or less.4

“...we need to improve access to jobs, and promote tourism. I’d like to see downtown become more attractive for small businesses—things that help make our community more vibrant.”

—FEMALE, SKAMANIA

4 Figures in this chart do not include respondents who gave some other response; therefore, total percentages do not add up to 100%. Individual responses that are not reflected in the chart added up to less than 2% each.
The road we want to travel down

Attitudes vary on growth and public transport

Residents expressed mixed views about our region’s economic growth. While almost half support elevating southwest Washington’s economic role in the state and across the nation, 38% expressed concern about too much development increasing their pace of life.

Almost half of those surveyed say they favor investing more tax revenue in public transit over spending more on roads for cars, and 45% believe shifting tax dollars from road and highway construction to public transportation is desirable.

“I’m concerned that development will encroach on our way of life.”

—FEMALE, COWLITZ
Strengthening our communities through education
More affordable college tuition and technical programs top the list

In the survey, 63% of people agreed that supporting quality education should be a high priority over the next five years. Also, when asked about allocating tax dollars to support the following six education actions—from pre-kindergarten to university and post-college workforce—most southwest Washington residents backed these initiatives.

- Make higher education more affordable and accessible by reducing the cost of tuition: 80%
- Expand engineering and technical education: 75%
- Increase workforce training: 73%
- Increase school funding to broaden curriculum choices: 69%
- Strengthen university research and development: 64%
- Provide pre-kindergarten to ensure students start elementary school prepared: 56%
Expanding opportunities for our growing workforce

Pro-business stance and on-the-job training rate high

FAVOR 70%

Ongoing education and training of our low-income workforce is a top priority for 70% of southwest Washington residents. And 59% say they favor building and communicating a pro-business attitude in local and state government.

“Let’s keep our schools strong by keeping funding strong.”
—FEMALE, CLARK
Pride in protecting our environment

Residents want to preserve natural resources and build pro-environmental attitudes

More than half of respondents say protecting our region’s green spaces is desirable, and that they would choose policies to help preserve environmental quality over economic growth. When asked about desirable economic development actions, 59% say they would favor building and communicating a pro-environmental stance in local and state government.

- 53% Support protecting southwest Washington’s environmental quality
- 52% Favor prioritizing environmental issues over economic growth in the next 10 years
- 49% Value conserving farm and forest land in the region
- 43% Oppose revamping land use laws to permit more development in green spaces
“We value the natural landscape in our region—it’s a beautiful place to live.”
—MALE, SKAMANIA
Satisfaction in what we do

Workplace values among southwest Washingtonians

When it comes to their careers, residents say they are more inspired by doing good things and working with good people than by having others admire their accomplishments or climbing the corporate ladder.

Most important workplace value:

- Doing a job I can be proud of: 49%
- Earning a good salary: 43%
- Being with people I respect: 41%
- Enjoying work, having fun: 41%

Only 11% rated being in a leadership position as most important, and 15% chose having others admire their accomplishments as most important.
Rewarding healthy lifestyles
Healthcare incentives get strong support

How best to keep healthcare insurance affordable across the region? The survey found 68% of respondents would like to see insurers discourage unhealthy behaviors, and create incentives to encourage healthy choices, in order to help control insurance costs.
Simple changes in our daily habits

Residents opt for living more simply

The survey found most southwest Washington residents believe the issue of climate change will require changes in our way of life, versus 40% who say they'd rather deal with the problem of climate change later.

Shifting away from a consumer-driven mentality

Nearly half of respondents also think that our country would be better off if we consumed less (31% strongly agree), compared with 44% who believe we should use our purchasing power as an economic driver.
“Each of our individual actions are important, [but] it is only our collective action that can change how we plan our community.”

—FEMALE, CLARK
Finding common ground in every community

Working together to address the issues that matter most

When asked about their personal futures over the next five years, the vast majority of southwest Washingtonians feel a sense of optimism. What about working across diverse communities to find common ground? 75% say they support finding common ground to address concerns about the issues that will influence their way of life in southwest Washington.

Eyes to the horizon

Keeping the regional conversation alive

These survey findings offer a window into what southwest Washington residents value about their communities—and what they believe is most important for building a brighter future. What’s next? Adding even more voices to the dialogue, so all corners of our region can be heard. Local residents, organizations, civic leaders, and policy makers will have the opportunity to join a series of community-wide conversations in 2015 about our standing as a region—and how we’d like to move forward.

Visit us online to receive updates and sign up for events: www.500kvoices.org
The inaugural 500,000 Voices survey engaged residents across the region to share their opinions on a variety of topics in order to learn more about the issues that matter most to them. DHM Research collected feedback from residents across three counties in a scientific survey (via phone and online) and in a public engagement track (online) to better understand who they are and what they stand for. An independent and nonpartisan firm, DHM has four decades of experience conducting opinion research in the Pacific Northwest and throughout the country.

Who participated?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>Scientific Survey</th>
<th>Public Engagement Survey</th>
<th>2012 Census</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td><strong>AGE</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>18–34</td>
<td>27%</td>
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<tr>
<td>35–54</td>
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<tr>
<td>55+</td>
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<td>52%</td>
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<td>63%</td>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clark</td>
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<td>88%</td>
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<td>Skamania</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ETHNIC GROUP</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
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<td>89%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>1%</td>
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</table>

\(^5\) In the U.S. Census, Hispanic, Latino, and Spanish origin is asked separately from race. The 500,000 Voices survey used one question and included Hispanic/Latino in a list of races. This is standard practice in non-Census surveys and explains some of the variation in numbers. Respondents to both the Census and this survey could give multiple responses; therefore, some percentages do not equal 100%.

“The majority of our local leaders are visionaries regularly looking to ... make the quality of life here even better.”

—MALE, CLARK