

# Cityscope

Q&A

## Coming Together

Clarkston Mayor Monika Lawrence talks about how she brought many voices to the virtual table to help her border community of 7,200 prepare for the unknown.

INTERVIEW BY JENNIFER KRAZIT

Clarkston Mayor  
Monika Lawrence

### **What brought you to Clarkston?**

I've lived in the Northwest for most of my life. I was living in Tri-Cities, and after my second husband died, I decided to move closer to my daughter, who lives here. I've lived in Clarkston for over 25 years now.

### **What did you do before joining city council?**

I worked for the school district in the special services department and worked with testing materials at the

district office. I've worked for school districts all my adult life in various capacities, mostly working with data and special programs.

### **What inspired you to get involved in local government?**

As most people do, you hear or read or see something you want to change. I read something in the paper that a councilmember said and thought, "That doesn't sound right."

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I was on council for about two years, from 2010 to 2012. But I was taking care of my infant grandson, and it was getting harder to keep up with everything, so I bowed out of council.

**You're now in your second mayoral term. Why did you decide to run for mayor?**

I was recruited, and I had to think about it really hard. I believe in serving my community, and I was doing that in other capacities. But I felt that there was a need and that if I could help out, I wanted to do it. I'm happy I did. We've had some turbulent times, but my goal is always for city residents to have a better place to live and work, and I felt I could contribute to that.

**What was your primary focus as mayor prior to the Covid-19 pandemic?**

We are a pretty small city, but we offer a lot of services: full-time fire and EMS, police, parks, a wastewater treatment plant, streets, etc. Most cities our size don't provide that many services. So my main focus was to ensure that those services are top-notch, and that what residents pay for is fair and just.

**Your city sits right on the Idaho border. How does that affect life there?**

A lot of people live in one community and work in the other. There is a lot of movement back and forth. In the valley encompassing Lewiston [in Idaho], we feel like we're one community because there's so much crossover.



Mayor Lawrence  
at city hall

**"I BELIEVE IN EXPLORING OPTIONS AND MAKING SURE THAT WHEN YOU MAKE A DECISION, IT'S THE BEST DECISION BECAUSE YOU'VE DONE YOUR RESEARCH."**

**What were some of the first steps Clarkston took to respond to the Covid-19 outbreak?**

We wanted to get right on board. We started meeting on March 6 and met weekly through March. Over time, we've included lots of people: our department heads, the City of Asotin, the sheriff, a representative of the county commissioner, Walla Walla Community College, the chamber, Tri-State Memorial Hospital's infection prevention manager, our jail

commander, and, since we are so connected to Lewiston, representatives from Lewis & Clark State College. All those counterparts had a stake in what Covid-19 would bring to their populations.

**What about city staff?**

We set guidelines for our employees, because anyone getting sick would have a huge impact on our ability to operate. I put out a mayoral proclamation on March 16 and closed city hall that day to protect our

workers. We continue to meet with department heads telephonically.

**What challenges has the pandemic brought to governing?**

We couldn't work from home to do things like HR, timesheets, and utility billing. We had to make sure city staff were updated on the latest information, because they were fielding a lot of phone calls. One of the biggest challenges was interpreting proclamations and understanding exactly what we were supposed to be doing according to the governor's guidelines.

**What has this experience taught you about leadership during a crisis?**

You have to do your homework, always, even when there isn't a crisis. I believe in exploring options and making sure that when you make a decision, it's the best decision because you've done your research. It's more difficult when it's something like Covid-19, and there are so many unknowns. But we sought out experts to make sure we were making the right decisions.

**Any other lessons learned?**

I'm thankful that our employees are so dedicated, whether they're a sanitation worker at city hall or police, fire, or EMS. If you have a good relationship with your staff, they're going to support whatever the council decides. Cities also need to look to our leaders at the state level, because they're at the forefront of this, and we have to support them.

## Clarkston

Cityvision looks at how Covid-19 has affected this border community in rural eastern Washington's Asotin County.

## POPULATION

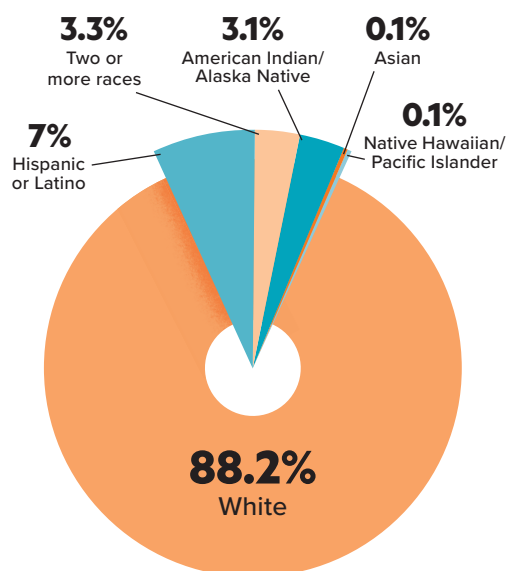
POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2010 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

2010 **7,232** 

2018 SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

2018 **7,407** 

## DEMOGRAPHICS



SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

## ASOTIN COUNTY POPULATION

2010 **21,623** 

2018 **22,582** 

## NEZ PERCE COUNTY (IDAHO) POPULATION


2010 **39,270** 

2018 **40,408** 

SOURCE: US CENSUS BUREAU

## COVID-19 CONFIRMED CASES/DEATHS (AS OF MAY 12, 2020)

## Asotin County

 18 confirmed cases

 2 deaths

## Nez Perce County

 70 confirmed cases

 19 deaths

## CONFIRMED COVID-19 CASES PER 100,000 RESIDENTS (AS OF MAY 13, 2020)

## Asotin County

 79.7

## Nez Perce County

 173.2

## King County

 321.5

SOURCE: ASOTIN COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH, IDAHO PUBLIC HEALTH NORTH CENTRAL DISTRICT, KING COUNTY