

General Information

Through the years, Richland has become a full-service city, providing general government services, including police and fire protection, water, waste and electric utilities, parks and recreational activities, maintenance of city streets and public facilities and library services. The city also pursues community and economic development and offers housing assistance.



Pre-1800s

The City of Richland, Washington is located at the confluence of the Columbia and Yakima rivers in the south central part of the state. Richland is within Benton County and is one of the Tri-Cities, which also include Kennewick and Pasco.

For more than 11,000 years, people have occupied a portion of the area that Richland now encompasses. For centuries, the Village of Chemna stood at the mouth of the Tapetett River, a Sahaptin name for the Yakima River, also called Tapteal. At Chemna, Sahaptin-speaking Wanapum, Walla Walla and Yakama Indians fished for seasonal runs of salmon and hunted small game, deer and antelope. They gathered berries, greens and root vegetables along the water and on the nearby hills.

1800s

In 1805, Captain William Clark of the Lewis and Clark Expedition ventured with two other men up the Columbia River to the mouth of the Yakima.

The first white settlers arrived several decades later when the John B. Nelson family attempted to settle, in 1864, on the south side of the Yakima River.

Benjamin and Mary Rosencrance arrived in 1880, living first on the south side and moving in 1888 to the north side of the river where they filed a homestead claim for 1,700 acres.

In 1892, Nelson Rich and Howard Amon formed the Benton Land and Water Company and located the town that would become Richland.

1900s

The first post office opened here in 1905, listing the town's name as Benton. At the request of the postal service, the town was soon renamed "Richland" to avoid confusion with another Washington community. On April 28, 1910, Richland was incorporated as a Fourth Class Town.

1940s

For many years, Richland was a small, sleepy farming village. Then in 1942, the federal government saw Richland's then remote location, abundant water supply and mild weather as the right combination it needed for a portion of its Manhattan Project. The United States government claimed the Town of Richland and dissolved the local government. Almost overnight, the village of 247 people developed into a federally-owned town of 11,000 residents; nearly all were employed at the Hanford Project. Thousands of workers from across the nation converged on Richland to construct facilities to produce plutonium for the world's first nuclear weapons.

1950s

In 1958, Richland was incorporated as a chartered First Class City, transforming itself from a federally controlled atomic energy community to a city governed by self-rule. Richland's population continued to climb as Hanford transitioned into weapons production during the Cold War years and later into an environmental cleanup mission.

Richland Today

The City of Richland is a full-service city, providing police and fire protection, water, waste and electric utilities, parks and recreational activities, maintenance of city streets and public facilities and library services. The city also pursues community and economic development and offers housing assistance.

Richland's primary goal during the early years of the 21st century is to diversify its economy and job base away from Hanford. A growing medical community, a national research laboratory and thriving tourism testify to the successes of Richland's efforts.

Richland's 2015 estimated population is 53,080. The city currently encompasses 42.16 square miles -- or 1.175 billion square feet!