



Orcas Island Response to COVID

ECONOMIC RECOVERY & RESILIENCY

PROGRESS REPORT



**GENERATING IDEAS
AND ACTION PLANS
AROUND A COMMON
PURPOSE.**

This summer, our Orcas Island community entered into an important conversation on what it would take for us to recover from the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to re-dress systemic racism that marginalizes Indigenous, Blacks and other People of Color. We saw these topics as urgent, given that the pandemic will be with us through the coming months and the crucial opportunities for societal change triggered by the movement for Black Lives Matter in the wake of George Floyd’s death.

We embraced this challenge despite the huge obstacles of life in pandemic times. Supported by a grant from the Orcas Island Community Foundation, we enlisted the Pomegranate Center, an organization with deep experience in facilitating large community gatherings focused on generating ideas and action plans around a common purpose.



The Pomegranate Center previously had conducted its community conversations in person. That process benefited from the vitality and energy generated by diverse people coming together in social settings. Unfortunately, Covid-19 ruled out this approach. In another time, we likely would have met together on the Village Green. Instead we had to turn to zoom meetings, a technology with lots of pluses, but also lots of negatives.

Our Pomegranate Center experts trained a group of diverse volunteers on the ERR Steering Committee as facilitators in this novel endeavor. This dedicated group was assisted by additional volunteers in the broader Working Group who came forward to help. We then launched two intense weeks of conversations.

Gathering online via 17 Zoom meetings about 200 participants offered hundreds of ideas for making the community more resilient, more inclusive, and better prepared for the future. One meeting was conducted in Spanish, one meeting was bi-lingual and one meeting included representatives from the Lummi Nation.

There was no pre-arranged script for which ideas should emerge. The guiding principle for the facilitators was that all ideas were welcome.

We are grateful that a large number of residents were able to participate from the safety of their homes. But we also understand that the technology was a barrier to other residents who did not have access to computers. We also are aware that July was an especially demanding month for many island residents who farm or who work in other aspects of our seasonal economy. Despite these difficulties, the community participants developed an impressive list of ideas that speaks to the needs and concerns of many corners of our island community.



Vitality and energy generated by diverse people coming together in social settings.

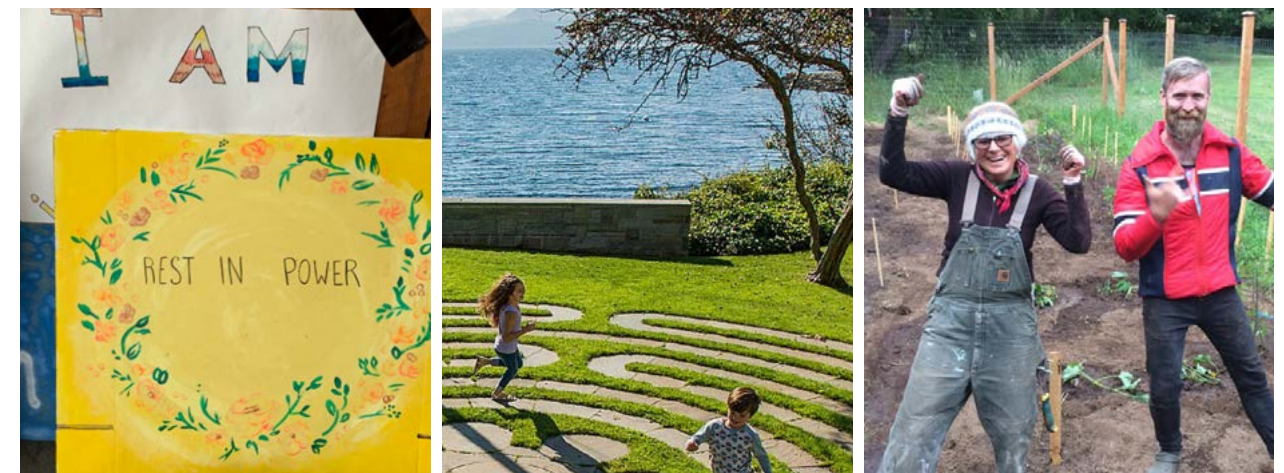
COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS WANT TO EMBED PRACTICES THAT ARE AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT OF OUR ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY.

It is clear that we all worry about the coming fall and winter. For that reason, there was an effort to prioritize ideas that could be advanced to action plans and then implemented in a significant way over the next six months. The Report reflects an urgency to make sure our community addresses the needs of the most vulnerable in our community as the pandemic continues.

You will see that urgency spelled out in the topic areas described below. You will not be surprised by them; they range from housing and food security to mental/physical health and support for childcare and families. We will need action plans to figure out how to greatly expand the capacity we already have on our island to respond to needs in these areas.

Our community conversation also revealed that people want to grapple with longer term projects to diversify our local economy and increase autonomy. These projects will take longer and will require a more extended planning process. We will need community members to step up and lead these projects, driven by passion for this idea and/or special expertise.

As a fundamental guiding light, the Report underscores that our community participants want to embed practices of equity and anti-racism in all activities we undertake. That is an essential ingredient of our economic recovery and resiliency.



THESE IDEAS PROVIDE A COMPELLING VISION



INCLUSION AND ANTI-RACISM



Embed practices of equity and anti-racism in all activities, and choose anti-racist actions in each theme listed below. When advancing any idea, lift up insights and ideas from people with lived experience. Engage in authentic relationships with the First People of this place and all who are under-represented and marginalized, including individuals who are Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

DIVERSIFY LOCAL ECONOMY AND INCREASE AUTONOMY



Diversify the economy with year-round businesses, cottage industries or work-from home. Foster jobs that are environmentally sustainable and do not extract income from the community. Have more control over local governance.

HOMES FOR ALL



Make housing accessible and affordable, with a focus on serving people who are traditionally excluded by virtue of income or race and, including shelter for individuals who are homeless.

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING



Establish a clear path to food security, and universal access to mental and physical healthcare services.

SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



Assure that children have equitable access to education and families have support for their children's social and emotional development.

COMMUNITY CARE



Foster relationships, service exchanges, and professional connections that enhance our connections with one another.

The themes stated above emerged from over 400 specific ideas generated at the community meetings. The top ideas, based on number of points for the specific idea, are organized below. One column lists ideas that could be addressed soon in order to help us make it through this coming winter. The other column lists more aspirational goals for the future that will take more time to implement



HOMES FOR ALL

Ideas for this winter

- Provide access to emergency shelter and hygiene facilities.
- Provide rent and mortgage assistance.
- Provide utility payment assistance.

Aspirational Ideas

- Develop more year-round affordable rental housing.
- Incentivize year-round rentals of private homes.
- Provide housing for moderate/ middle income and seniors. Small clusters for single persons.



HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Ideas for this winter

- Regular COVID testing for all essential workers and robust contact tracing.
- Assure all islanders have food- grow more food on island, increase access to food bank and reduce stigma/ more programs.
- Peer-support system for mental health and to address isolation.

Aspirational Ideas

- Mobile free eye clinic
- Expand and simplify access to health care.
- Comprehensive mental health and substance recovery support, including cultural competency and understanding of inter-generational trauma.
- Women's shelter with food and healthcare integrated.



SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Ideas for this winter

- Provide safe and equitable access to school and daycare.
- Have activities in the afternoons for kids and teens.
- Sustain integrated learning opportunities between Coast Salish tribes and Orcas youth.

Aspirational Ideas

- Develop a robust anti-racism curriculum through all grades.
- Incentivize year-round rentals of private homes.
- Provide housing for moderate/ middle income and seniors. Small clusters for single persons.



COMMUNITY CARE

Ideas for this winter

- Assistance for families unable to access government programs.
- Establish a fund to help families with costs for medical emergencies.
- Robust delivery system for people in isolation.
- Neighbor-to-neighbor wellness checks

Aspirational Ideas

- Establish a community kitchen for local food production.
- Continue to engage community in conversations to enhance and improve life on the island.



The Community Emergency Response Fund Advisory Team, supported by the Orcas Island Community Foundation, initiated this effort to learn more about the needs and opportunities facing the Orcas community by working with a broad and diverse group to lead community conversations.

The next steps are up to all of us. If there is a specific area of interest to you, we encourage you to step up and reach out. Your engagement is key to a resilient community.

The Community Emergency Response Fund Advisors, Volunteer Facilitators and Working Group:

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Apologies to anyone who was left off the list.



Fostering philanthropy to enhance and preserve the quality of life on Orcas Island

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