

## **Economic & Workforce Recovery Task Force**

### **Building County-wide Resiliency for Businesses, Workers and Our Community**

*October 28, 2020*

#### **Overview**

The Economic and Workforce Recovery Task Force convened a meeting on October 21, 2020, to review the work completed to date on COVID-19 response and recovery efforts and assess what more needs to be done to build resiliency into the economy to support businesses, workers, and the community. The following themes and findings emerged as well as strategy recommendations to accelerate economic recovery and advance economy mobility. These recommendations were brought to the Task Force Implementation Committee on October 26 and approved to ensure execution can begin in November to meet federal requirements.

#### **Resiliency Themes & Findings**

- Aerospace, manufacturing, agriculture, small business services, and tourism have shouldered the brunt of the economic downturn and may not return to pre-pandemic levels for years. Due to decreased revenue, they are unable to innovate their business models, train existing employees, or hire new employees, especially younger workers entering the workforce.
- Equitable and inclusive outcomes for all workers and residents in Snohomish County need to be a center piece for building economic resiliency in the County's economy. Strategies to support economic resiliency must build in equitable and inclusive outcomes to ensure workers and businesses in the County can take part in the economic recovery.
- Remote working and schooling will most likely be the future for many employees and students even after the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided. Internet access continues to be a concern across the County as more businesses and schools delay full in person re-opening. Issues discussed include access, speed, and reliability all of which impact economic recovery, educational outcomes, and equity and inclusion.
- The pandemic has caused enormous workforce displacement in the County. There are approximately 30,000 workers in Snohomish County who qualify for Federal funds for job seeking. Businesses need assistance identifying, developing, and training talent for business resiliency and workers need to reskill to be able to take advantage of these opportunities and pursue careers in high demand occupations and growing industries.
- The pandemic is still front and center in Snohomish County bringing great uncertainty about when the virus' spread will diminish and its overall impact on the economy. There was a general sense that the County, like the rest of the country, is still responding to the immediate crisis of the pandemic and has not yet turned the corner into recovery.
- Many business centers across Snohomish County are being impacted by the lack of workers. As a result, local governments across the County need to understand the economic impact caused by the pandemic and plan for how best to support their local businesses and workers to support economic recovery and resiliency.

- Small and medium size employers are facing similar hardship as a result of the pandemic. If economic recovery continues slowly, these firms could downsize or close, further exacerbating the impacts on businesses as well as workers. Projects that support moving businesses online have helped provide additional revenue to small businesses. There is a need to understand the impacts to local businesses, share best practices, and explore options to innovate to a changing economy.
- Resiliency planning must be strategic and collaborate with public and private partners to accelerate work and receive any future state and federal funding if the opportunity arises.

## **Resiliency Strategies**

The Task Force meeting yielded recommendations to support building resiliency among businesses, workers, and the wider community in Snohomish County so they can anticipate and react to the current COVID-19 economic situation and evolve in an everchanging environment. The strategies are designed to build equitable and inclusive outcomes that will further strengthen resiliency in Snohomish County and utilize State and Federal funds to enhance and scale implementation.

### **Small Business Resiliency**

The economic impact to communities and small businesses throughout Snohomish County as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic needs to be understood to support building strong and resilient communities and businesses. These strategies support research and planning initiatives to foster greater resiliency among small businesses, local main streets and communities, as well as minority businesses who have been most impacted by the pandemic.

#### **Economic Resiliency Planning for the Future**

*Purpose & Goal:* To undertake necessary research and planning development to support repairing and rebuilding small business and grow jobs in communities throughout Snohomish County that were lost as result of the COVID-19 pandemic for businesses and cities to implement immediately.

- *Deliverable:* An economic development strategy for economic recovery and resiliency building that is tailored for each Snohomish County district that cities, towns and local jurisdictions can immediately use to address the challenges faced by downtowns and main streets, local businesses and workers as a result of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

#### **Women and Minority Small Business Resiliency**

*Purpose & Goal:* With a focus on addressing pervasive equity gaps, and recognizing that women and minority small businesses may have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 health emergency and increasing opportunity for all, conduct a review of existing and unmet resources, establish a Snohomish County Small Business and Microenterprise recovery strategy and implement outreach meetings and the strategy that will address the economic damage done by the COVID-19 health emergency. Leverage existing resources and build new partnerships through virtual meetings and workshops which will help strengthen resiliency in Snohomish County's small business, entrepreneurship and Women & Minority Owned Business Enterprises support system after receiving damage from the secondary effects of the response to the COVID-19 health emergency.

- *Deliverable:* Develop a Women- and BIPOC-owned action plan and implement based on an analysis to identify the strengths and gaps in Snohomish County's small business service delivery and address equity, inclusion and opportunity gaps. The action plan would be provided to the Economic Alliance Snohomish County and local communities for use and would include initiatives to leverage partnerships, increase

outreach and improve systems to address equity gaps and increase access and opportunity outcomes for women and minority owned businesses across Snohomish County.

### **Business Resiliency Partnership**

*Purpose & Goal:* To understand the needs of businesses, how best to support them, and to work with them to become more resilient in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. This will support the retention of existing businesses, create and retain jobs, and build economic resiliency.

- *Deliverable:* A platform with information to support businesses, promote best practice sharing through email newsletters and webinars, and talent identification to fill needed positions in possible partnership with regional and state efforts.

### **R3**

*Purpose & Goal:* Support small businesses during the fall while COVID-19 cases rise and consumer confidence wains.

- *Deliverables:* Funds to support employee retention and PPE purchasing.

### **Career Resiliency**

Approximately 30,000 workers across Snohomish County need jobs as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and companies in growing industries need talented and skilled workers to fill open positions with good career opportunities. These strategies support programs that can support workers who have been laid-off or furloughed due to the pandemic and provide them with opportunities to upskill for new careers in high-demand occupations and growing industries throughout Snohomish County and the Puget Sound region.

#### **Skill-Up!**

*Purpose & Goal:* To support dislocated workers whose jobs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic by providing them with additional skill training for careers in high-demand occupations.

- *Deliverable:* Skill development programs for laid-off or furloughed workers to acquire the skills to enter high demand occupations that will support career and business resiliency.

#### **Tech Training Academy**

*Purpose & Goal:* To support dislocated workers whose jobs were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic pursue careers in high demand occupations in the information technology industry and then match them to business who need the talent to support innovation and resiliency.

- *Deliverable:* Targeted training programs for Snohomish County displaced workers over 18 years of age targeting women, veterans, people of color for training or apprenticeship. Training will focus on high demand software programming skills for high wage job placement support with small, medium and large technology firms.

### **Sector Resiliency**

Nearly every sector of the Snohomish County economy has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Hardest hit has been the County's largest sectors—aerospace, agriculture, manufacturing, service industry, and tourism—that employ large numbers of skilled workers and have seen a significant number of layoffs. These strategies are designed to strengthen these sectors and make them more resilient to future shocks through strengthening supply chains, introducing new innovation, marketing, and promotion.

## **Snohomish County Aerospace Resiliency Plan**

*Purpose & Goal:* To support near-term recovery from the COVID-19 crisis and promote resiliency of the County's aerospace industry, preserving businesses and jobs.

- *Deliverable:* Assist Snohomish County aerospace employers impacted by the COVID-19 crisis by supporting them in the implementation of readiness strategies to meet the economic issues of the aerospace industry and to inform those resilience strategies with an analysis of shifting market demand for parts, services, skills, and certifications. Support current state and regional projects for the aerospace industry and help employers with their readiness strategies.

## **5G Food Resiliency**

*Purpose & Goal:* COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the County's agriculture sector, affecting businesses, workers and consumers. Because suppliers and customers of agriculture businesses have had to go virtual to address social distancing requirements, the agricultural business community requires access to technology and bandwidth that they do not have to function in the new COVID-19 world. This would establish an agriculture virtual and physical space for Snohomish County to bring together growers and distributors impacted by COVID-19 with 5G technology companies to collaboratively develop new capabilities that will improve the resiliency of County's agriculture sector and minimize future disruptions and economic impact.

- *Deliverables:* A virtual and physical space to bring 5G wireless technology to areas of the County where access is limited. The testbed will provide agricultural businesses with a platform for innovation, academic research, and industry collaboration to support food resiliency. Through this partnership, Snohomish County can develop a resilient agriculture sector that is prepared to meet the needs of consumers in the new COVID-19 environment.

## **Tourism Resiliency Promotion**

*Purpose & Goal:* Communicating to local, national and international tourists that Snohomish County businesses are safe and ready for them to visit, a necessary step to repair the damage done to the industry by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is ever more important since Snohomish County had the first diagnosed case of COVID-19 in the country. This strategy will undertake promotion and marketing initiatives to publicize the resumption of tourism activities and steps taken by businesses to ensure a safe experience during the holiday season.

- *Deliverables:* Promotion and marketing initiatives to support Snohomish County businesses that publicize the resumption of tourism activities and steps taken by businesses to ensure a safe experience.