



Science in Support of Local Decision Making for COVID-19:

A DIALOGUE WITH COASTAL COMMUNITIES

Brief Summary

In October 2021, the Washington State Academy of Sciences hosted the second dialogue in a series on how COVID-19 is affecting local communities. WSAS engaged closely with community members and organizations to understand which issues were most important to them. Based on these discussions, this virtual event was focused on housing concerns facing coastal counties, specifically Clallam, Jefferson, San Juan, and Island counties. These counties, made up of rural and suburban communities, range in population size from 17,000 to 85,000. Many of these areas have historically served as tourist and retiree destinations. They experienced an outsized impact from shifts in housing patterns due to the pandemic, which exacerbated challenges with affordable housing in the region.

Panelists brought expertise from academia, non-profits, real estate, and community development:

Celestina Barbosa-Leiker, *Vice Chancellor for Research, Washington State University Health Sciences Spokane (moderator, WSAS member)*

Laura Benjamin, *Senior Planner, Puget Sound Regional Council*

Gregg Colburn, *Assistant Professor, Real Estate, University of Washington*

Lance E. German, *Real Estate Agent, ReMax Prime, Clallam County*

Jamie Maciejewski, *Executive Director, Habitat for Humanity of East Jefferson County*

Jennifer Sherman, *Professor, Sociology, Washington State University*

Greg Winter, *Executive Director, Opportunity Council, Island, San Juan, and Whatcom Counties*

Questions posed in the dialogue came from the preceding engagement process, the panelists' input during planning, and from event registrants prior to and during the dialogue. The questions covered themes such as:

- **What are the long-term impacts on a community that lacks affordable housing?**
- **What is the role of housing in meeting other community needs?**
- **Can equitable housing be achieved without encouraging more growth?**
- **What regulatory changes have worked to increase the housing supply?**
- **How can market pressures be mitigated to protect affordability in destination communities for vacationers, retirees, and telecommuters?**
- **How do state policies and regional approaches intersect with local policy options?**
- **What can be learned from other regions addressing similar issues?**

Throughout the discussion, panelists fielded questions and built on or responded to each other's statements, often highlighting the interconnectedness of the issues at hand and bringing in the context of broader social issues, as well as experiences in other localities. A clear outcome from the event was the recognition that there is no single solution to the current housing challenges that face coastal Washington—instead, continued partnership is needed among nonprofit and for-profit organizations, alongside public investment to make solutions sustainable. Feedback from panelists and registrants characterized the dialogue as generative, unpacking the complexity of how COVID-19 has affected housing in coastal Washington communities.

As a result of this WSAS-led Community Dialogue, panelists noted that they were able to form new connections with others working on similar issues in their community. This dialogue sparked conversations and brought awareness to how non-partisan and science-based entities can contribute to dialogue about local solutions across communities.