

Building Economic Resilience and Social Capital in Ocean Shores, Washington

By Kevin Decker & Naomi Korchonoff



Special thanks to



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Contents

Message from Mayor Crystal Dingler	5
Introduction	7
Location.....	7
Sociodemographic	7
Project Overview	8
Local Data	9
Traffic Counts	9
Sewer Influent.....	10
Hotel and Motel Revenues and Sales Taxes	10
Community Engagement, Process, and Results	12
Local Business Stakeholder Surveys	13
Resident Surveys	19
Recommendations	22
Diversify Tourism Marketing	23
Increase Business Cohesion	23
Enhance Identity and Theme.....	24
Reduce the Shoulder Season.....	24
Increase Web Presence.....	25
Create Memorable Experiences	25
Align with Regional Partners	25
Create a Tourism Civic Group	25
Build Community Capital.....	26
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	27

Tables

Table 1: 2019 per capita, median household, and average household income in Ocean Shores, Washington, Grays Harbor County, and the United States.	7
Table 2: Table of select population characteristics in Ocean Shores, 5-year average, 2014–2019.	7
Table 3: Frequency of the types of businesses owned by survey respondents.	13
Table 4: Frequency of the sources of information businesses use to support or maintain their business.	13
Table 5: Number of survey respondents interested in a community building program with other stakeholders.	18
Table 6: Level of commitment by survey respondents in investing in a community-led business program.	18

Figures

Figure 1: 2010–2018 average traffic count by month.	9
Figure 2: 2010–2018 monthly traffic count by year.	10
Figure 3: 2010–2018 average sewer influent by month.	10
Figure 4: 2010–2018 average hotel receipts by month.	11
Figure 5: 2010–2018: average hotel tax revenue by month.	11
Figure 6: Frequency of the number of years that survey respondents have owned or managed their business.	13
Figure 7: Frequency of the different methods used by survey respondents to market their business to potential customers.	13
Figure 8: Frequency of counts of year-round employees in addition to the owners.	14
Figure 9: Frequency of survey respondents stated month that the slow season starts.	14
Figure 10: Frequency of the percent decrease in sales during the slow season.	16
Figure 11: Frequency of survey respondents stated month that the busy season starts.	16
Figure 12: Number of employees usually hired during the busy season.	16
Figure 13: Percent that sales increase during the busy season.	17
Figure 14: Months that survey respondents indicated they experienced the effects of seasonality in Ocean Shores the most.	19
Figure 15: Number of respondents that are impacted by seasonality.	19

Message from Mayor Crystal Dingler

First, I would like to thank the local citizens and business people who came together, meeting throughout the winter of 2019–2020, to help us develop the perspectives and ideas presented in this report. In addition, we were fortunate to have research efforts provided by Kevin Decker, PhD in Environmental Sciences; Dr. Decker’s time was generously provided to the project by the Washington Sea Grant program. Naomi Korchonoff, a graduate student from Evergreen State College, joined the project as an intern; she was paid by the City of Ocean Shores. Jacob Cravey, (MBA in Sustainable Systems, from Tree Ring Consulting, who works with The Nature Conservancy and its Coast Works Innovation Network), facilitated the group meetings, drawing forth ideas, information, and memories through a variety of facilitation techniques, which kept the meetings lively and interesting.

Kevin, Jacob, and I all participate in the Innovation Network, which supports coastal projects such as ours and seeks to help people thrive in Washington. The group meets annually in a Project Accelerator with others along The Nature Conservancy’s Emerald Edge, which includes the west coast of North America from Southwest Alaska to the Olympic Peninsula, sharing projects and ideas to develop cross-pollination. The vision is that communities must be resilient and thrive to be able to support conservation, and of course, conservation must exist for communities to be resilient and thrive.

Many thanks to Naomi and Jacob, and special thanks to Kevin who took the raw materials of the first draft and notes for this report and developed it into a potentially powerful tool to help our community and coastal region to achieve its goals. Ultimately, it is ours to use and implement as we recover eventually from the pandemic and the toll it is taking on the economic viability of our community, city, and region.

The economy of Ocean Shores and much of the North Beach region of Washington State is driven by tourism, construction, and a continuing influx of retirees. Innovations over the past 20 years have included the introduction of the Quinalt Beach Resort and Casino by the Quinalt Indian Nation, development of the Seabrook Coastal Beach Town by a small group of investors, and the general growth of the entrepreneurial service

industry. Economic assets include a variety of unique ocean and freshwater locations that attract visitors, new residents, and workers to our communities from around the Northwest. Additionally, significant areas of undeveloped property and broad entrepreneurial and construction capacity helped development. The region has a strong presence of financial institutions, Grays Harbor College, access to state colleges, and the Greater Grays Harbor Chamber of Commerce. In addition, Indigenous peoples have a rich history in the region.

Throughout the Northwest, many residents and developers are becoming more interested in investing and building in walkable locations that are well-served by transit and have a mix of residential and commercial uses. New developments, like the Washington coast’s newest resort, Oyhut Bay, located in Ocean Shores, are helping to create jobs and to attract capable workers. Since 2000, the population of Ocean Shores has increased from 3,836 to an estimated 6,700 according to the State’s Department of Commerce in 2020, nearly doubling in population. The average age, however, has increased from 57 in 2010 to an estimated 60 in 2018, indicating that retirees are moving to the Shores faster than young families or workers.

Prior to the pandemic, the traditional measures of economic prosperity revealed an Ocean Shores economy that had largely recovered from the 2010–2014 downturn and had been performing well from 2015–2019, allowing the city and businesses to recover. The value of new construction rose from \$22m in 2015 to \$43m in 2018; hotel-motel tax from \$650k in 2013 to over \$1m in 2018; and sales tax from \$800k in 2015 to \$1.1m in 2018.

What these numbers do not reveal, however, is that not everyone was benefitting equally from the local economic upturn. Since the recession, some hotels and businesses have invested in significant improvements to their properties, while others have fallen into decay or stagnated. The persistent seasonal economy limits its potential year-round hotel occupancy, which falls sharply after August highs and does not pick up significantly until Spring Break. This also affects the local service industry workers, who experience significant economic disparities due to the seasonal economy, with jobs disappearing in the fall and not reappearing until spring. For businesses, this means that good, well-trained employees may have accepted year-round jobs elsewhere and may not be available the next season. So

new training must take place, available employees may not be as motivated, and additional costly supervision is necessary.

A growing body of research shows that a more equitable economy is a more resilient economy, better able to maintain long-term growth. That is, the greater the number of people who benefit from the good times, the better able the entire community is to sustain itself through global downturns or crises. The region needs to determine an economic path forward that opens up economic opportunities for all residents in order to be resilient.

Historically, the coastal economy dips when the general population of visitors is concerned about broader economic issues. These issues are largely out of the control of local forces. The City of Ocean Shores, for instance, continued to market heavily after the beginning of the Great Recession, with no visible effect on the falling local economy.

In the fall of 2019 and winter 2020, Ocean Shores businesses reported that their workers were increasingly unable to find affordable housing. The problem appears to be multi-layered, showing challenges with not only the availability of low-income housing in the communities, but a lack of living-wage jobs, a lack of training to obtain higher-wage jobs, a lack of adequate public transportation, and, of course, the seasonality of the work. Seasonal jobs typically provide only minimum wage and required benefits. Because our region is a highly desirable place to live, housing prices have continued to increase since the Great Recession and, despite considerable numbers of housing starts of single-family dwellings, the supply of available and affordable multi-family dwellings is not keeping up with demand. Business success and job growth may be limited by the lack of employees over the next several decades. If the region cannot adequately meet the impending housing demand, Ocean Shores and the North Beach will lose talented workers to other regions as they look for year-around jobs in less seasonal and more affordable places.

The advent of the COVID-19 pandemic has, temporarily at least, turned the city's economy on its head. Non-essential businesses were closed and travel restrictions

put in place by the Governor. In response to continuing 75–84% visitor traffic numbers, Ocean Shores closed its hotels and other nightly rentals in an effort to encourage potential visitors to remain at home and stop the spread of the virus. While the city had felt fairly confident with \$1.5 million in reserve and another million plus in emergency funds, the advent of the pandemic and lack of income to the city caused great concern. On April 30, 2020, the city laid off or reduced the hours of almost half its 100-person workforce in the face of abrupt reductions in city income. By July, most of those employees were back working at their regular hours, largely because of federal government programs that assisted the unemployed, small businesses, and local governments, and the relatively quick movement of the county through the phases of state-allowed re-opening. At this time, the longer-term effects of the ongoing pandemic on the economy and citizens remain uncertain.

Creating more jobs and effectively linking workforce development programs to these jobs should also be a priority in the Ocean Shores region. The region needs to work with its local college on collaborative workforce development initiatives. It also needs to continue to identify ways to decrease the skills gap and to train and educate the future and current workforce to fill available and emerging jobs.

The region further needs to focus on building not only a strong economy but a resilient one that is dependent on a more diverse set of businesses, built to endure the anticipated impacts of climate change, wind storms, and flooding, and that ensures that people from all economic backgrounds have access to opportunity. Climate change, downturns in the national economy, and other impacts inevitably impose unpredictable threats to the region's success. Creating an adept, flexible, and equitable local economy is the only way to ensure continued growth and success in Ocean Shores and the North Beach. We need to use our civic and business vitality and innovativeness to propel us into the future, build a strong network of people and communities who work side by side to achieve goals, and, finally, build sustainable economies throughout our coastal region that provide living-wage jobs and equity and recognize that only through conserving our natural resources may we retain the values inherent in coastal life.

Introduction

LOCATION

Ocean Shores is a rural city with a population of about 6700. It is relatively small, yet is more densely populated than most parts of Grays Harbor County. The city sits on an 8.5 square mile peninsula along the coast of the Pacific Ocean. It is situated above the Chehalis River’s confluence that feeds into the Oyehut Channel, and just south of the Quinault Indian Nation reservation. It has been one of western Washington’s most well-known beach vacation destinations since its incorporation in 1970. The northern stretch of the coastline above the city leads to the Quinault Beach Resort and Casino (QBRC) and is commonly known as “North Beach.” The North Beach stretch of Pacific coastline and Ocean Shores’ ocean-front beach comprises some of Washington State’s most extensive recreational beaches open to the public.

Ocean Shores also has the benefit of being situated in a region that is rich with economic opportunity in tourism, recreation, and ocean-based transport and trade. The greater Grays Harbor region has many tourist attractions, including the Olympic National Forest and Olympic National Park, both within a 45-minute drive of Ocean Shores, and green spaces within walking distance of most hotels. Recreational opportunities such as charter boat fishing and whale-watching are available at the Port of Grays Harbor Westport Marina, which leads the state’s international exports in seafood and soybean meal.

The economy of Ocean Shores is primarily tourism driven. There are diverse options available in the city that keep visitors in town. Some activities include beachcombing, wildlife viewing, parks that are walking distance from most hotels, canoeing and kayaking in the canals of Duck Lake, and storm watching from a safe distance on the beach for adventurous locals and tourists.

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC

The age distribution in Ocean Shores is skewed towards an older age. The median age is 60.9, with residents aged 60 years or older comprising more than 50 percent of the population. Persons 18 years old or younger comprise 15 percent or less of the population. In comparison, the nearby town of Westport has a median age of 38. The United States Census Bureau statistics for national, state, and county median age groups estimate that the largest proportion of Americans fall into the mid-range category of 35 to 45 years old. However, the demographics of Ocean Shores are not strikingly different from other towns in the United States that market themselves primarily around tourism and real-estate sales.

In 2019, the estimated median per capita income (PCI) in Ocean Shores was \$26,797, which is about 19 percent lower than the national average of \$33,028. Median household income (MHI) in Ocean Shores was \$47,087, or 22 percent less than the national average of \$60,548 (Table 1). Additional population characteristics are provided in Table 2.

Table 1: 2019 per capita, median household, and average household income in Ocean Shores, Washington, Grays Harbor County, and the United States.

	Ocean Shores	Washington	Grays Harbor County	United States
2019 Per Capita Income	\$26,797	\$38,706	\$22,372	\$33,028
2019 Median Household Income	\$47,087	\$73,627	\$48,031	\$60,548
2019 Average Household Income	\$55,215	\$99,689	\$56,962	\$87,398

Table 2: Table of select population characteristics in Ocean Shores, 5-year average, 2014–2019.

U.S. Census Bureau Quick Facts for Ocean Shores, WA | 5-year average 2014–2019

Population Characteristics

Owner-occupied housing unit rate	75.00%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units	\$219,800
Median selected monthly owner costs - with a mortgage	\$1,277
Median selected monthly owner costs - without a mortgage	\$495
Median gross rent	\$1,011
Persons per household	2
Percent of persons living in same house over 1 year	83.50%

The 2017 5-year average unemployment rate in Ocean Shores was 11.9 percent, while the unemployment rate in Grays Harbor County was 10.1 percent, Washington's unemployment rate was 6 percent, and the national unemployment rate was about 6.6%.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The objective of this project is to increase economic resilience within the Ocean Shores community—specifically, to address the adverse effects created by seasonality associated with a tourism-dependent economy. Economic resilience is broadly defined as a system's ability to adjust to the ever-increasing frequency of economic, social, and environmental changes within its limitations, such as geographic location, population, and industry. The term applies to the economic characteristics of an area that influence its overall resilience to disruptions. It refers to outside shocks from economic depressions, shifts in national market trends, and natural disasters that can weaken the community's ability to regain economic stability in the aftermath.

Although the length of the last economic recession was technically short, it created considerable economic stress nationwide. It had lasting repercussions for many areas of the country. These effects are often more pronounced in small towns in remote or rural areas that have been historically sustained by one or two industries. Seasonality in tourism existed before the last recession but has worsened in some areas of the United States. The Grays Harbor County economy and its tourism industry have been particularly stricken since the recession, the effects of which are widespread according to the Department of Commerce, USDA, and other government sources. In Ocean Shores, with its extreme westward remoteness and considerable diversion from major freeways, seasonality is characterized by sharp declines and intermittent periods of tourism in the shoulder season (cold months) and high volumes of tourism during the peak season (warm months). Annual profits are often dependent on the influx of tourism into the town as well as the support of residents. As a result, seasonal fluctuations often cause significant financial stress for the business community in Ocean Shores during the shoulder season.

The prevalence, duration, and impact of seasonality on tourism-based economies are often contingent upon the level of reliance on tourism. Single-industry dependence reduces the adaptive capacity to rebound from external shocks. Coastal seasonality is more commonly associated with fluctuations in the amount of tourism to coastal communities than other areas in the Pacific Northwest. This is due to a tendency for higher precipitation and extreme weather near the ocean, although it can occur anywhere. Lower volumes of visitors during periods of rough weather and in-between holidays are typical, exacerbating the symptoms associated with economic dependence. The underutilization of resources in the shoulder season contributes to the overhaul of businesses' capacity to manage unpredictable volumes of tourists during the peak season, leading to staffing issues and employee burn-out due to excess work-hours and understaffing. The manifestation of these symptoms can result in less risk-taking in business, where communities focus on tried-and-true methods in marketing and other business ventures instead of trying new ones. This can result in a cyclical process where seasonality incrementally worsens each year from reduced visitor appeal, the desertion of seasonal labor due to employment scarcity, housing insecurity, and the subsequent appearance of "emptiness" during colder months.

Unlike many towns in the greater Grays Harbor County region, Ocean Shores has never been economically dependent upon finite natural resource markets, such as the timber industry. In contrast, the Ocean Shores economy is almost wholly reliant on revenues gathered from tourism, event hosting, and to a lesser extent, the sales of vacation and retirement homes. Although single-industry dependency reduces the capacity of a system to absorb and recover from external shocks, tourism can offer many benefits to communities. While the gradual movement away from economic dependence on natural resources has been a difficult transition for many rural towns and cities in the United States, the development of tourism can alternatively provide numerous community-wide benefits. The city's income from tourism helps reduce the overall tax burden of public utilities and city maintenance on its residents. For Ocean Shores, some of these benefits include an increased diversity of dining options, additional recreational opportunities, and increased business activity in other non-tourism businesses during peak seasons.

Dominant business sectors are service-related, locally owned and operated, dependent on seasonal labor during peak-season months, and independently market themselves. Service sector types include restaurants, hotels and motels, and business and professional services such as real estate and travel agencies. Each of these business sectors experiences some or all of the challenges associated with coastal seasonality, including reduced tourism during the shoulder seasons, insufficient employment pools of qualified candidates, and overstaffing problems during the peak season. Many business owners in Ocean Shores are accustomed to these changes. They have adapted their business practices to withstand seasonal variations each year. Shoulder season slumps are natural in the northern hemisphere and often occur regardless of rigorous tourism planning.

Local Data

Relevant local datasets were provided by the City of Ocean Shores, the Ocean Shores Public Utilities Department (OSPUD), Washington Department of Revenue, and the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). These include traffic count, sewer influent, hotel and motel tax revenues, and hotel sales tax. All data were distributed into groups based on monthly averages across eight years (2010–2018) and analyzed for common patterns in tourism during shoulder and peak seasons.

TRAFFIC COUNTS

There are two traffic counters in Ocean Shores. The first is located at the city entrance, and the second on Short Cuddy Ave. The benefit of these traffic counters is that they capture all vehicles entering the area, including day-trippers and people who may be camping or live nearby, and who may not stay in a hotel or use the bathroom. As such, the counters are probably the most accurate at capturing actual demand in the area. July has the highest traffic count, with an average of 506,835 vehicles. In contrast, January has the lowest average at 264,700 vehicles, almost half of the peak.

There appear to be three distinct “seasons” in Ocean Shores. The peak visitor season consists of July and August. The mid-season months include April, May, June, and September. The shoulder season includes October, November, December, January, February, and March, which is half the year (Figure 1). On average, there has been a gradual increase in cumulative traffic volumes to Ocean Shores over the last nine years, with a small variation each month from year to year (Figure 2).

2010 – 2018 Average Traffic Count

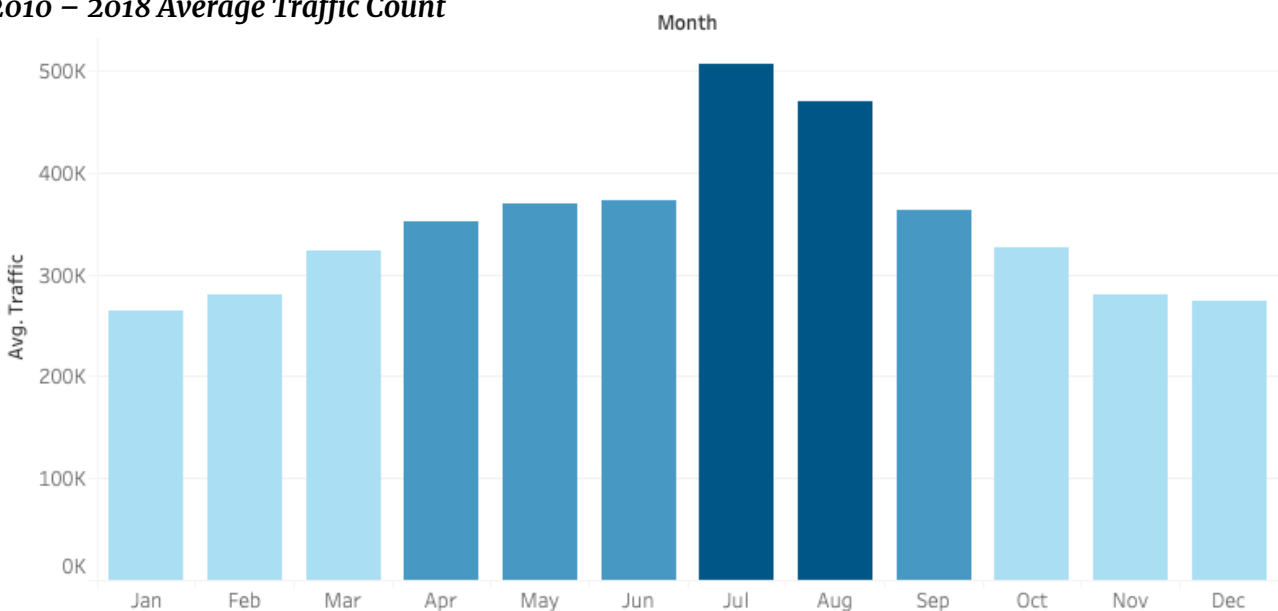


Figure 1: 2010–2018 average traffic count by month.

2010 – 2018 Traffic Count by Month

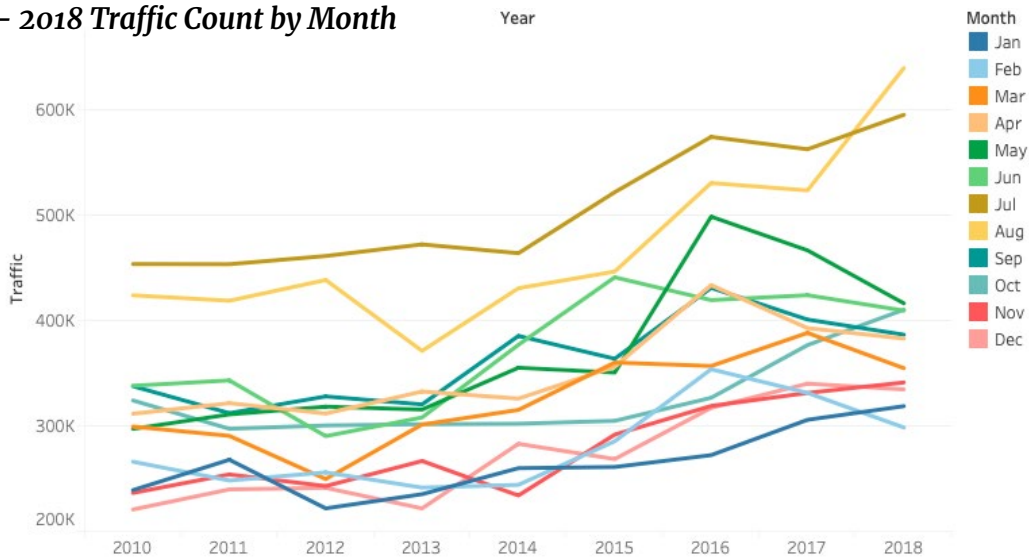


Figure 2: 2010–2018 monthly traffic count by year.

SEWER INFLUENT

Sewer influent is the untreated wastewater coming into a wastewater treatment plant. Water and sewer influent was provided by the Ocean Shores Public Utilities Department. Based on the average gallons per day for each month, July and August are still the busiest months of the year, but August has a higher average (Figure 3). This is despite the larger traffic count that is seen in July.

HOTEL AND MOTEL REVENUES AND SALES TAXES

Hotel taxes and sales receipts from 2010–2018 show that the highest rates of revenue and taxes occur during September and October (Figure 4 and Figure 5). However, there is a two-month lag between the month the tax is reported and the month in which it is collected. This indicates that, as expected, many more people are staying overnight in the peak season. There is also significant traffic leading into September and October when colder nights also make it more likely that visitors will stay in a temperature-controlled environment rather than at a campsite.

Influent

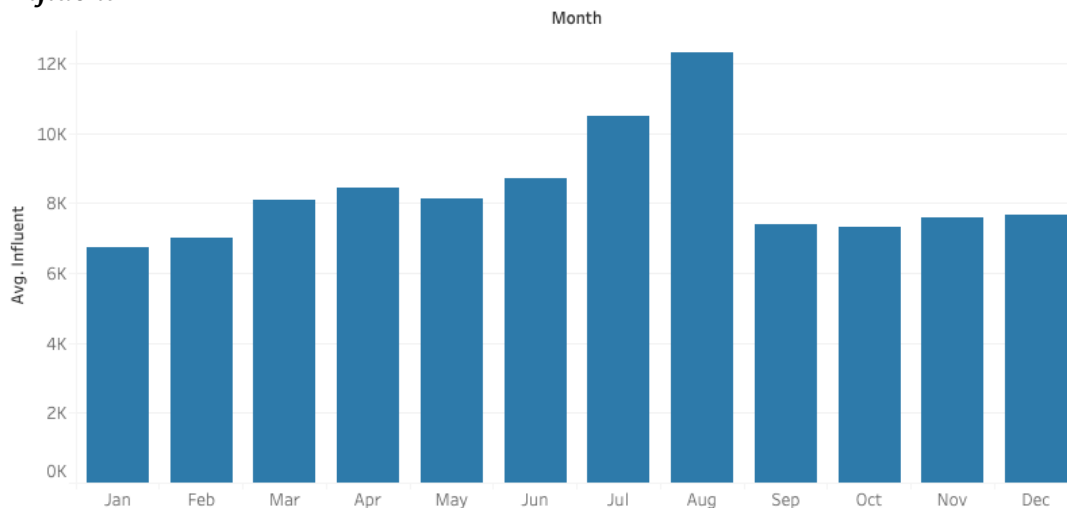


Figure 3: 2010–2018 average sewer influent by month.

Hotel Receipts

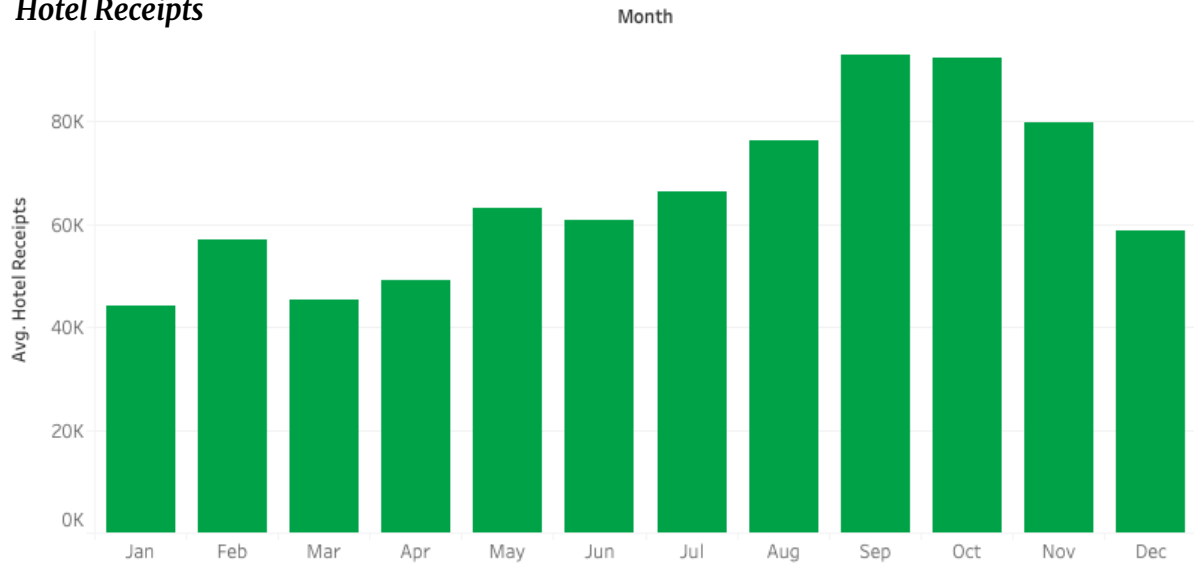


Figure 4: 2010–2018 average hotel receipts by month.

Hotel Tax Revenue

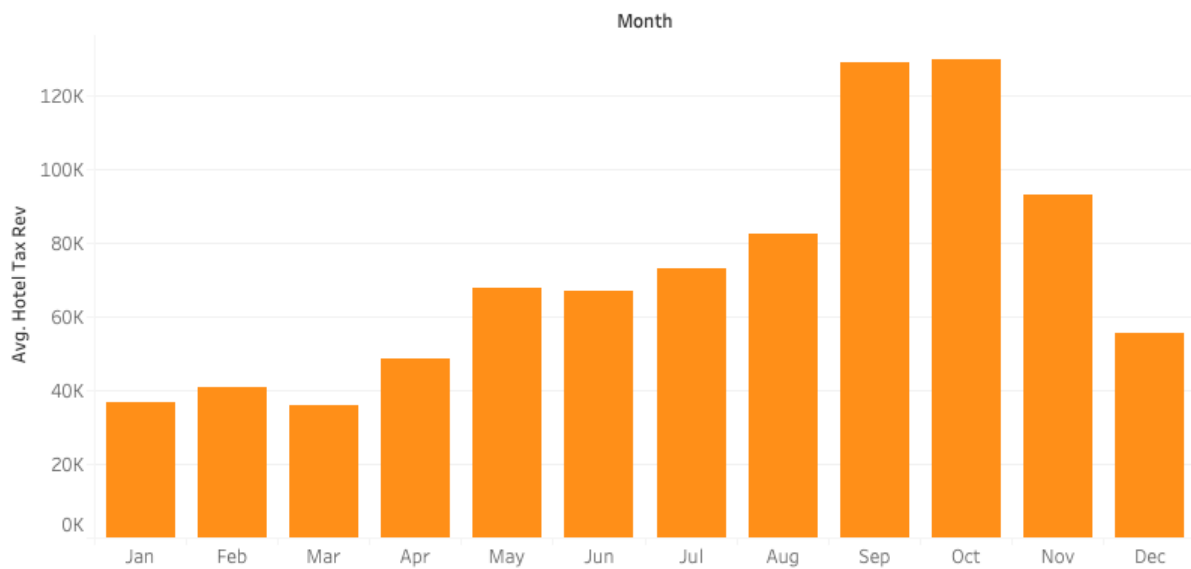


Figure 5: 2010–2018: average hotel tax revenue by month.

Community Engagement, Process, and Results

Between September 2019 and February 2020, a series of workshops was held in Ocean Shores that included business owners, community members, city representatives, county representatives, and others. The workshops utilized a community-centered design, in which the community itself is used to identify and implement creative solutions. The purpose of these meetings was to form a set of ideas and attainable goals for creating economic resilience in Ocean Shores.

To begin the process, a conversation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) was conducted, emphasizing strengths and opportunities. The working group was presented with a community capitals framework to provide a foundation upon which to build the conversation. A community capitals framework is a method for mapping community resources and assets, which are typically categorized by built capital, financial capital, political capital, social capital, human capital, cultural capital, and natural capital. The comprehensive list below was created by the working group and includes opportunities and ideas to increase resilience, rooted in the strengths and assets of Ocean Shores. Items are not presented in any particular order, and no ideas were filtered or removed based on any standard.

- Build a real estate expo around outer coast marketing.
- Expand marketing to include TV advertisements and other media options, but consolidated by a single marketing professional.
- Incorporate Octoberfest into the event calendar.
- A Christmas lighting ceremony that begins the day after Thanksgiving until New Year's Eve, with a coordinated "lights-on" policy.
- Have an event based on a parade on the canal.
- Create a clam and brew event.
- Bird watching in the off-season.
- Market to seniors, couples, and others who form the base of the target audience.
- Make an "offer" to existing summer tourists that bring them back during the off-season.

- Look into a long-term advertising plan; advertising is ineffective without sustained duration.
- Activities for bad weather: razor clam digs and storm watching.
- Tsunami threat safety awareness and reassurance.
- Trolley car for in-town transportation.
- Make the outer coast a bikeable community by tapping into the county's phenomenal bike rack plan.
- Market QBRC and the golf course.
- Affordable housing and transportation needed for the sustainability of the tourism industry.
- Pull from neighboring town's strategies (create partnerships).
- Consolidation of the downtown business sector.
- Improvement of the convention center—technological and connectivity issues.
- Build a boat launch.
- Finish North Bay Park.
- Inter-regional partnerships and collaboration are a "must."
- Downtown core businesses must extend business hours.
- Themes: beach theme, uniform color of business and other buildings

Ongoing conversations focused on building a more cohesive business community (CBC). This topic rose to prominence based on perceptions of the business community and as a consequence of the recent collapse of the local chamber of commerce. However, the working group did not provide a sufficient representation of the business community, so the group decided to distribute a survey to capture as many voices as possible.

Local Business Stakeholder Surveys

During a four-week period, stakeholder surveys were conducted from questions that were developed during the working group meetings. Sixty surveys were sent out, and a total of 42 electronic surveys were completed. The online survey contained the following 17 questions and had the following results:

How many years have you owned or managed your business?

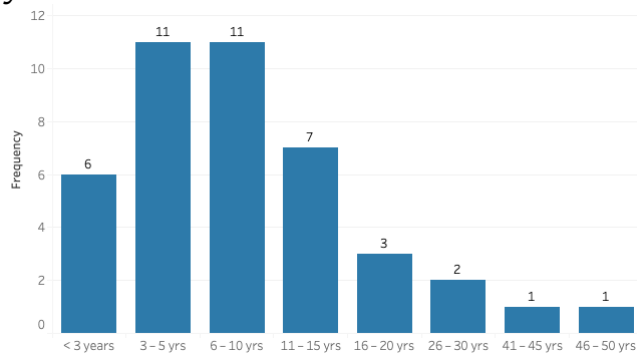


Figure 6: Frequency of the number of years that survey respondents have owned or managed their business.

Table 3: Frequency of the types of businesses owned by survey respondents.

What kind of business do you own or manage?

Retail Trade	12
Food & Beverage	9
Lodging, Leisure, & Hospitality	7
Real Estate, Rentals, & Leasing	6
Prefer Not to Answer	2
Virtual Business, freelance writer	1
Remote Sales & Service	1
Recreation & Sports	1
Professional & Business Service	1
Online Bead and Mineral Sales	1
Manufacturing	1
Information & Technology	1
Dog wash	1
Construction, Maintenance, & Other Service	1
Bicycle, kart rentals	1
Arts, Entertainment, & Recreation	1
Arts & Crafts	1

Table 4: Frequency of the sources of information businesses use to support or maintain their business.

Where do you get your information or support on how to improve or maintain your business?

Source	Frequency
Internet searches	23
In-person or online classes	18
Conferences and workshops	14
Community	14
Journals, magazines, books, and other research sources	13
Local marketing agency	2
Community, Conferences and workshops	2
Teach a series of related workshops	1
Surveys sent to each guest automatically after each stay	1
Previous owner	1
POS company	1
My gut feeling	1
Grays Harbor College Economic Dvpt Office	1

How do you market your business to potential customers?

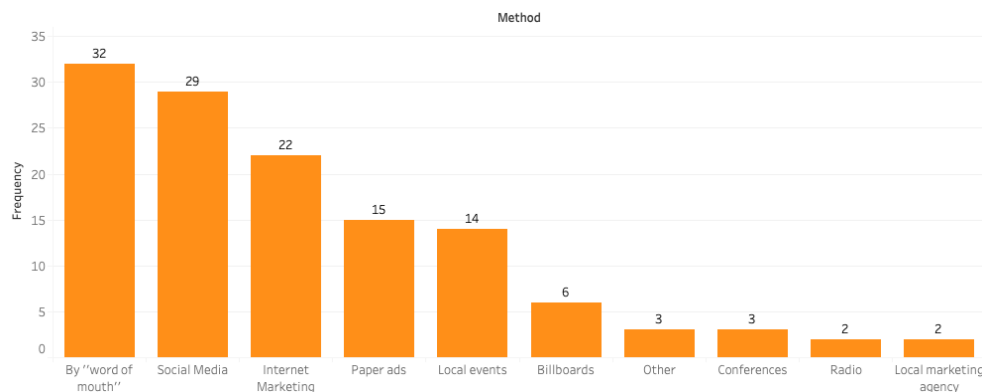


Figure 7: Frequency of the different methods used by survey respondents to market their business to potential customers.

How many year-round (non-seasonal) employees does your business have in addition to yourself and co-owners?

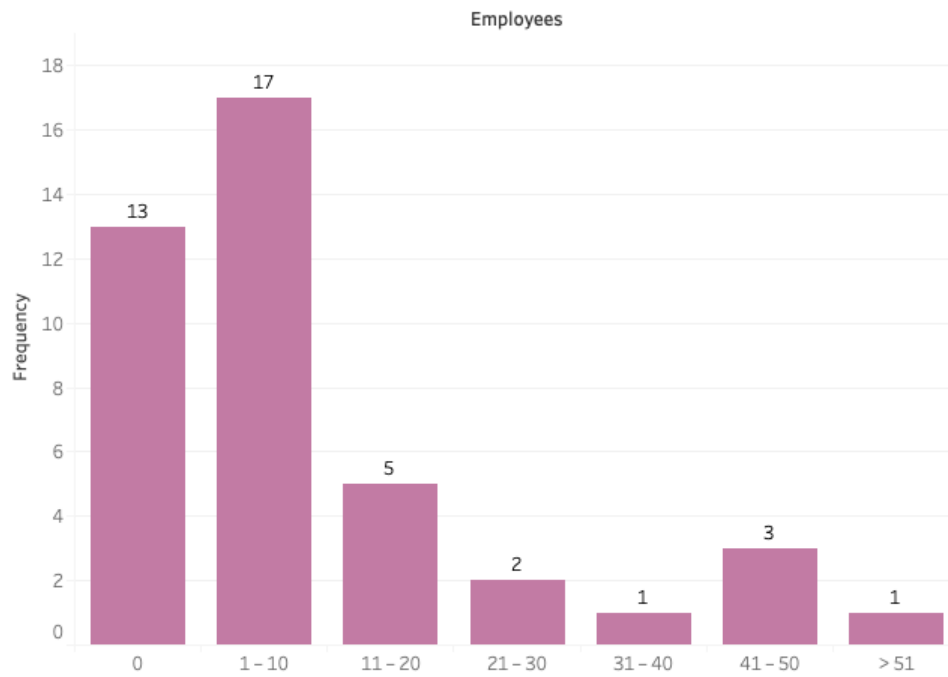


Figure 8: Frequency of counts of year-round employees in addition to the owners.

When does the slow season usually start for your business?

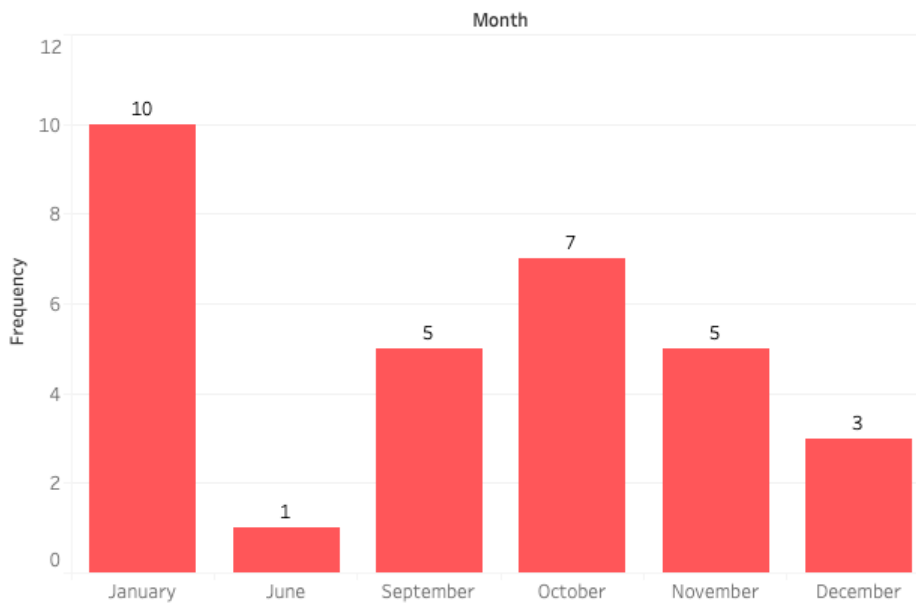


Figure 9: Frequency of survey respondents stated month that the slow season starts.

What major issues do you have during the slow season? (X# indicates the number of times an answer was given by a respondent)

- ◆ Paying the bills and keeping staff onboard. (x4)
- ◆ We own a vacation rental property.
- ◆ We do not have a slow season. (x2)
- ◆ Enticing other businesses to cross-refer customers.
- ◆ Lack of tourists/customers. Need city-wide events. It would be nice if the convention center lowered prices to attract more events.
- ◆ Lack of people traffic and locals turning more toward online shopping.
- ◆ Not enough customers; difficult to meet expenses.
- ◆ Not bringing in enough money. (x2)
- ◆ (Difficulty) attracting buyers to Ocean Shores.
- ◆ Keeping staff for full-time positions
- ◆ Dwindling occupancy as only two real “industries” here are beach and clam digging.
- ◆ Week-long and too many clam digs in any season decreases occupancies.
- ◆ Lack of customers and people in town (x3).
- ◆ Some days the restaurant is so slow that it’s not worth opening.
- ◆ Unsold inventory, small orders, leading to expired products.
- ◆ Stagnant inventory.
- ◆ Occupancy drops.
- ◆ Not enough people coming to the beach.
- ◆ Stocking, so the store still looks full while trying not to spend a lot on inventory.
- ◆ Weather.

How do you handle these challenges?

- ◆ Add specials and incentives to bring in customers, and also try and cater to the locals to ensure a more stable season.
- ◆ Special sales and tightly managing inventory and expenses.
- ◆ Always planned ahead, understanding the seasonal nature of Ocean Shores. (x3)
- ◆ Using the (slow) season to shop and recover from the summer season.
- ◆ More online presence. (x2)
- ◆ Take a vacation in the slow season.
- ◆ Emphasizing winter events and storm watching.
- ◆ Usually have to cut FT positions to 30–32 hours vs. 40 in summer.
- ◆ Staff members cut back in relationship to occupancy percentage.
- ◆ Decrease pricing more and more.
- ◆ Went to 2 days a week closed (Monday and Tuesday) and have other revenue streams to get through the slow winter.
- ◆ Looking for a good place to park my food truck during the slow months to help offset slow months.
- ◆ Close October to March 1.
- ◆ Sales and promotional marketing can mitigate some of the effects of the summer slump.
- ◆ Market to repeat guests for storm watching, reunions, etc.
- ◆ Use more social media marketing, boosting posts, and special promos such as stay two nights get one free.
- ◆ Do as much marketing as we can, run specials. (x2)
- ◆ Decrease staffing.
- ◆ Set money aside in the busy season to survive the slow season

On average, by what percent do sales usually drop during the slow season?

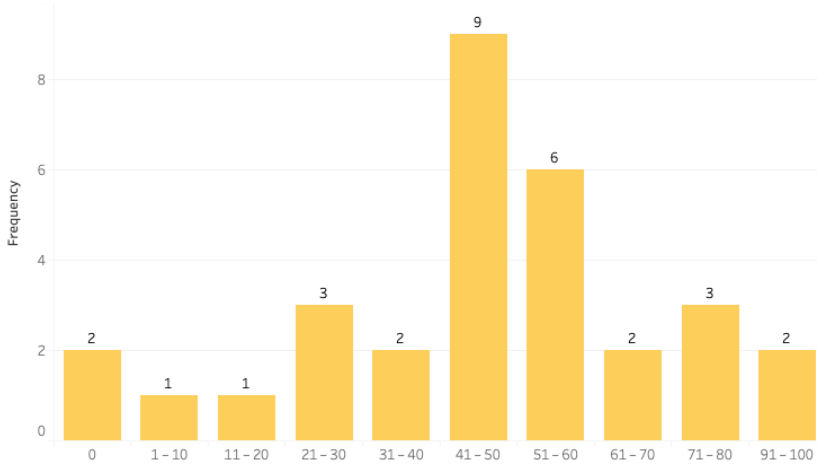


Figure 10: Frequency of the percent decrease in sales during the slow season.

When does a busy season usually start for your business?

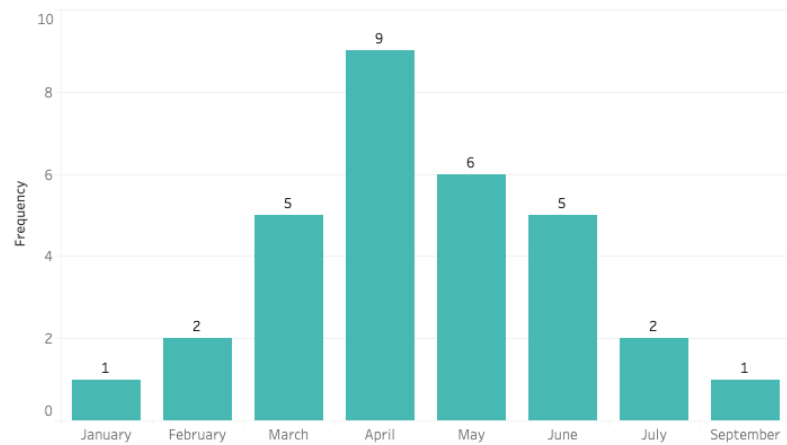


Figure 11: Frequency of survey respondents stated month that the busy season starts.

How many employees do you usually hire during the busy season?

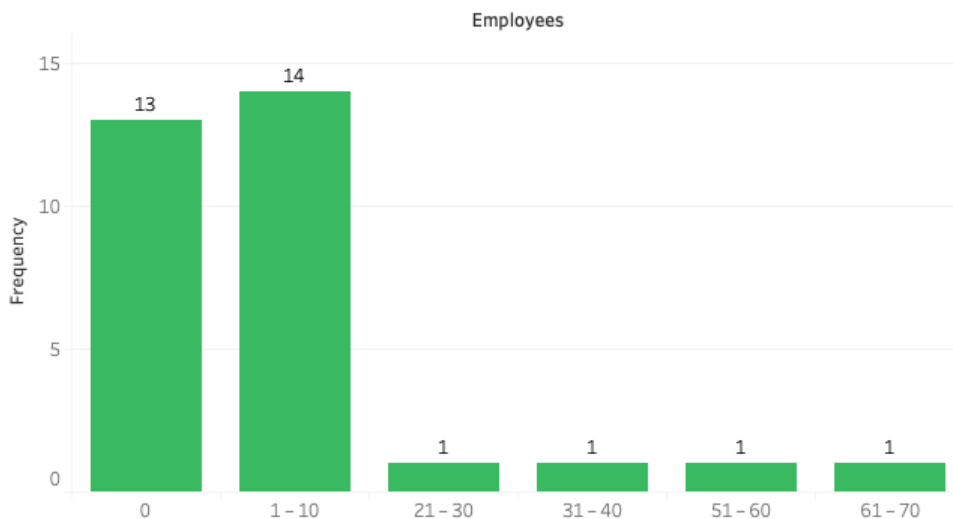


Figure 12: Number of employees usually hired during the busy season.

What major issues do you have during the busy season?

- ◆ Not enough staff. (x9)
- ◆ Insufficient capacity. (x3)
- ◆ Employee and affordable housing. (x2)
- ◆ Wear and tear from increased traffic. (x2)
- ◆ Keeping quality inventory. (x4)
- ◆ Insufficient parking. (x2)
- ◆ Not enough time.
- ◆ Managing people.
- ◆ Lack of sidewalks for customer use.
- ◆ Mistreated employees by customers.

How do you handle these issues?

- ◆ Start recruiting early in the season.
- ◆ Recognize the cycle and plan for it.
- ◆ Take a few days off to recoup.
- ◆ Use J1 Visa students.
- ◆ Started working with Express for new hires.
- ◆ Work more hours.

On average, by what percent do your sales usually increase during the busy season?

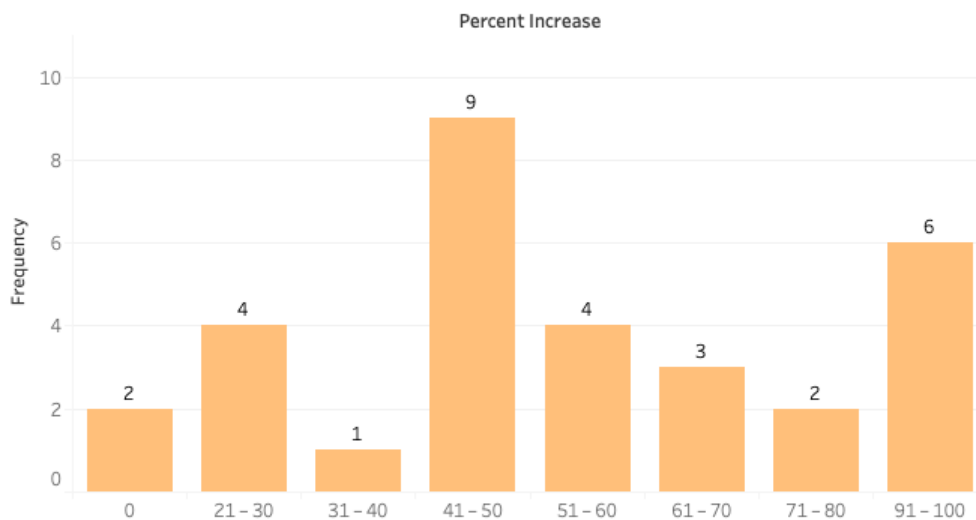


Figure 13: Percent that sales increase during the busy season.

Do you have any ideas about how to extend your busy season?

- ◆ Create more events that will bring people into town.
- ◆ More event-focused promotions, working with QBRC on expanding events.
- ◆ Daily specials, target things for people to do during the off-season that they can't find or do otherwise. Give people a reason to come out and come to Ocean Shores.
- ◆ Bringing in events and/or developments to improve and attract tourists to keep coming back.
- ◆ We need activities to attract non-locals.
- ◆ More off-season events and vacation rentals.
- ◆ Marketing Ocean Shores, boardwalk on the beach, sidewalks in town, ferry to Westport.
- ◆ Focus on clam digs and storm watching.
- ◆ Targeted advertising.
- ◆ More events, a winter concert series, bring in conventions, etc.
- ◆ More corporate type groups or business travelers.
- ◆ Less events in the busy months and more in the off months.
- ◆ Advertising outside of Grays Harbor promoting a beach town.
- ◆ Events or a good place to park with the food truck.
- ◆ Take on more wholesale clients with steady customer activity.
- ◆ Marketing in the southern hemisphere.
- ◆ Concerts at the convention center, conventions at the convention center, holiday-themed event.
- ◆ Market to professional training groups, corporate clients/professionals (medical, dental, pharmacy, etc.).
- ◆ Attract families out here on the weekends when school is out.
- ◆ More events.
- ◆ Get people to shop at night.

What would you like from a community business association in the future?

- ◆ Working together.
- ◆ Focused, let's-make-it-happen-group, hopefully with people that want to make things happen rather than a fractioned group. Create achievable milestones.
- ◆ Businesses-after-dark concept was great once a month in getting us together to socialize and strategize as a community. We should operate as a team rather than individuals.
- ◆ I believe we should have a community business association; however, it should be formed and run by the businesses.
- ◆ The best advantage from the associations is the information readily available from other businesses, plus the support network and camaraderie.
- ◆ To be successful, the association would need to provide more than "social" networking.
- ◆ Would like any business association to think about diversity, not just doing the same old thing.
- ◆ Representing the business community in city matters.
- ◆ I would like one that is reciprocal.
- ◆ Joint marketing opportunities.
- ◆ Hotel-group. A chance to get pricing in line.

Table 5: Number of survey respondents interested in a community building program with other stakeholders.

Would you be interested in a community building program with other stakeholders?

Answer	
Not sure.	6
Yes, absolutely!	10
Yes, but with some hesitation.	12

Table 6: Level of commitment by survey respondents in investing in a community-led business program.

What level of commitment would you be interested in investing in a community-led business program?

Answer	
Low	5
Moderate	12
High	7

Resident Surveys

Additional stakeholder surveys were conducted that asked residents of Ocean Shores to provide feedback on the business community and seasonality in Ocean Shores. There were 78 respondents, comprising 76 residents, 1 non-resident, and 1 past resident. Of these responses, the median number of years lived in Ocean Shores was 6 years, the mean was 9.4 years, the minimum was 1 year, and the maximum was 52 years. The online survey contained the following questions and results:

Which months of the year do you notice the effects of seasonality in Ocean Shores the most?

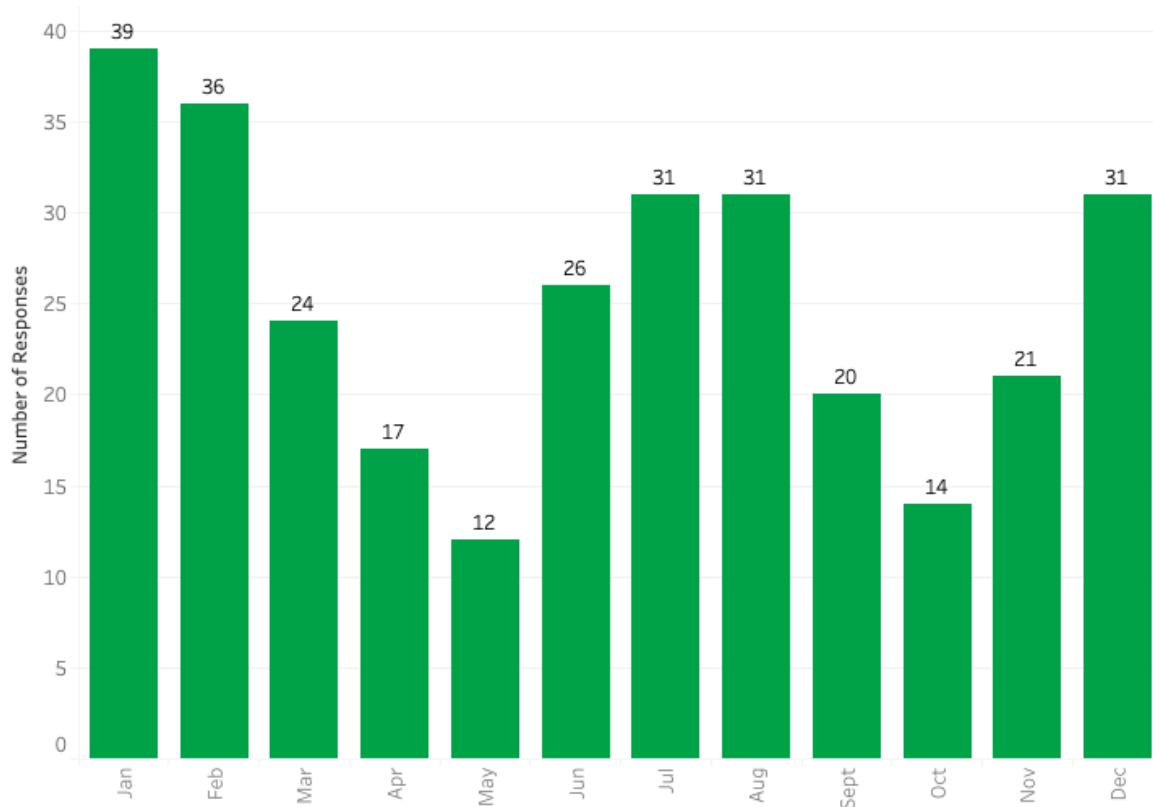


Figure 14: Months that survey respondents indicated they experienced the effects of seasonality in Ocean Shores the most. (More than one option could be selected.)

Are you and your family impacted by seasonality?

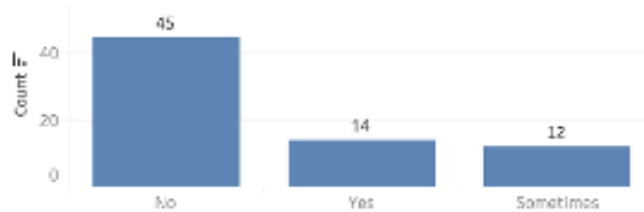


Figure 15: Number of respondents that are impacted by seasonality

Describe how seasonality in Ocean Shores affects your family.

- ◆ The city is very congested in the summer months, so I generally avoid the commercial district during those times.
- ◆ I notice more traffic in the downtown area a few weekends in the summer. Also, I notice the fireworks on the 4th. A couple of businesses close for winter. My neighborhood (South Sand Dune SW) is quiet year round.
- ◆ We live south of the business area and spend as little time in the business area as possible, so we don't feel the impact during the busy times.
- ◆ More busy in town in the summer.
- ◆ During busy times, May–September, it is harder to move around and shop and dine.
- ◆ I've been to most events many times so don't really participate or care much for seasonal activities. I'd be happy if they all never came back.
- ◆ Less traffic.
- ◆ Retired and enjoying not working.
- ◆ We love the tourist season with all the people.
- ◆ Crowds in summer affect purchase and drive times. More waste, 4th of July especially.
- ◆ Work definitely slows down after the hectic summer season. Rain tends to keep people indoors. Number of visitors drops off.
- ◆ Fewer events and business closing early means less opportunity to network with other community members.
- ◆ Business slows and hours are reduced.
- ◆ Traffic in town and on the beach can be frustrating. Traffic on 109 is miserable in the summer with slow RV traffic. Need a passing lane.
- ◆ Less traffic in off season. Less people.
- ◆ My daughter works in a restaurant, and it affects her hours.
- ◆ Traffic increases and decreased quality of life during the high season. Try to stay away from shops during the weekend.
- ◆ Traffic, shopping patterns, hours at work.
- ◆ More traffic—particularly hard to turn at entrance to Ocean Shores from Damon Rd. Mess at the turn—around downtown, some retailers charge higher prices, employees at certain locations do not like to see more people and are ruder than they normally are.
- ◆ Longer wait times in restaurants or any place you go.
- ◆ Higher prices. Poor healthcare.
- ◆ This is a tourism-based economy and the tourists are present so is the disruption to properties by parties, camping, fires, and generally more people on the streets.
- ◆ Affects my personal business.
- ◆ My restaurant became pretty slow during the week—a lot slower this past fall and winter than a year ago (down by over 60% on many days).
- ◆ I avoid the grocery store on the summer weekends.
- ◆ Crowded grocery stores, traffic.
- ◆ Stay away from downtown on most weekends. Go grocery shopping elsewhere.
- ◆ Makes it both easier and more difficult to shop and dine out. Easier if the restaurant/shop is open during the slow tourist season, but can also be a hinderance if the restaurant or shop is closed or has limited sporadic hours.
- ◆ Busy businesses in summer months.
- ◆ We are retired and other than dealing with heavier traffic during peak season, we are not affected by any ups or downs of tourism.
- ◆ Only with regard to busier restaurants and stores, more traffic, but I like seeing people in our beach town enjoying their time here.
- ◆ The city is more congested in the summer months, making us less likely to go out to the commercial district.
- ◆ Weather related.
- ◆ Being retired, the seasonality really does not impact our household much. Maybe a few restaurants close or have reduced hours, but most other things still exist. The number of people does not change the healthcare and other services here. Weather may impact landscaping and home repair services.

- ◆ I am in the health care field so does not impact me.
- ◆ I avoid downtown when it becomes too crowded. However, I do participate in most events to some degree. I have limited tolerance for crowds and noise.
- ◆ My sales go down at the local gallery I have my art in. Can barely afford to cover the cost of showing there through the off-season time.

How can the business community in Ocean Shores adjust to seasonality?

- ◆ Bring in light manufacturing that is not impacted by the weather.
- ◆ Open more businesses that cater to local residents. Sponsor activities geared to locals, like wellness fairs and cultural events. Hold these events during the quieter seasons and attract people from other communities in Grays Harbor County into Ocean Shores.
- ◆ Businesses need to work together, and they need to sponsor business the business community. The convention center needs to have better marketing, with new events.
- ◆ Market to people to come here off season for conferences, meetings, etc.
- ◆ Come up with more things to do and more reasons to visit Ocean Shores from October to April.
- ◆ Freshen up the faces of a lot of the businesses in town. Bike paths in the dunes would be great.
- ◆ Businesses stay open later. Offer more public events with less restrictions on food trucks.
- ◆ Offer discounts to Ocean Shores residents. Clean up businesses such as signage and cleanliness.
- ◆ Prepare in advance for the slow season. Offer incentives to locals. Advertise specials and incentives for tourists.
- ◆ Be prepared for the slow season. Offer incentives for outsiders to visit. Offer more housing for all income levels. Bring in manufacturing or other businesses that create non-seasonal job opportunities through incentives. Build better “downtown” pedestrian and bike friendly routes for tourists, like Cannon Beach.
- ◆ Revamp the beach town appearance. Clean up establishments, keep doors open later, have a consistent front façade like Oyehut, Seabrook or the boardwalk shops.
- ◆ Have more activities at the convention center to draw people from out of town to use hotels and restaurants.
- ◆ Attract more events that will bring tourism year round.
- ◆ Embrace a sense of identity. Once the city can agree who it wants to be as a community, use that to move forward with promoting events. Use the convention center, golf course, and natural beauty to attract tourists. Embrace, locals, campers, and tourists to be successful.
- ◆ Don’t raise prices during the summer.
- ◆ The convention center could schedule more events.
- ◆ Plan for the slow season. Provide goods and services that cater to the locals. Develop an online presence.
- ◆ Bring in more business meetings or events during the fall and spring.
- ◆ Get more people here in the slow times.
- ◆ Vendors on the beach.
- ◆ More varied inventory so that locals don’t have to go out of town for items such as basic clothing.
- ◆ Hire more staff.
- ◆ More events and lower food prices.
- ◆ Fewer camping lots and more designated areas for full-time residents.
- ◆ Beach food trucks. Better walkability. Boardwalk in front of hotels before the dunes. Easier to Airbnb. Better restaurants. Cater to both tourists and retired residents.
- ◆ Improve the downtown area and find a theme that fits. Make downtown more attractive by improving appearance. After hours activities. Bring in additional activities and vendors that are willing to stay open. Businesses need to work together instead of against each other.

- ◆ Diversify revenue streams. Assistance with social media or other methods to get word out for special events.
- ◆ Restaurants should have opportunities to do food trucks.
- ◆ Offer food trucks and street vendors. Provide safe walkways and crossways. Offer a bus or trolley through the main business streets. More benches for eating.
- ◆ Provide entertainment at the convention center to attract visitors.
- ◆ Promote and create off-season activities such as storm watching and indoor concert festivals.
- ◆ More winter festivals.
- ◆ Develop a program that would place and maintain flower pots; beautify Ocean Shores!
- ◆ Reorient itself to focus on becoming more eco-friendly and sustainable.
- ◆ More winter activities scheduled at the convention center.
- ◆ Create a “locals card” to provide offerings to locals. Decorate the town for the season. Replace banner sign poles with carved poles sponsored by businesses. Hang plants on the light poles.
- ◆ The city should try to invite businesses that are not seasonal. Attract virtual/remote workers, light industry, and support the Coastal Interpretive Center with educational programs all year round.
- ◆ More events at the convention center.
- ◆ Promote storm watching. Build a storm watching tower.
- ◆ Lower off-season prices for locals.

Recommendations

Recommendations for the community of Ocean Shores cover potential economic resilience-building strategies in the form of guidance and actionable steps. The intent is to advise Best Management Practices (BMP) informed by relevant research, analysis, and community priorities to lay the groundwork for continued examination in the future. These recommendations were informed by the working group, stakeholder interviews, survey responses, and supporting research.

-The working group provided a list of steps that could be taken relatively inexpensively and in a relatively short amount of time. These items are identified as “low hanging fruit” that could have an immediate impact on increasing economic resilience. The top three have been identified, and the rest of the items on the list are provided without any priority.

1. **Signage** – Use less signage and be more strategic with the use of signs. Use signs to direct visitors to the visitor center and attractions around the area.
2. **Increase web marketing** – internet and social media marketing can be more adaptive and responsive to activity in the community. It should be used more strategically to draw visitors into the area.
3. **Beautification** – Identify ways to “clean up” the community. This can include picking up trash, creating corridors of flowers or art, and painting and touching up buildings and structures around town.
 - *Create new events* – Events help to draw people to the area. More events mean bringing in more people. Focus on new events to be held during the slow season to create a more even flow of visitors.
 - *Improve event management* – management of local events has been inconsistent. This has led to a decrease in quality and cohesiveness. Ensure that events have well-defined coordinators, budgets, resources, and plans that can be handed off to others when necessary.
 - *Create a business association* – addressed below
 - *Ecotourism* – The City of Ocean Shores sits surrounded by incredible ecological opportunity. The city should focus on embracing ecotourism in the region and seek opportunities to market ecotourism and include it in vacation packages for the region.

- *Determine an identity and embrace it* – While Ocean Shores is a beach community, it doesn't always have that "feel" around town. Ocean Shores should embrace its identity as a beach community and promote and highlight those characteristics. Ocean Shores is also more than just a beach town. The prevalence of artists in the area provides a ripe opportunity to highlight art across the community. The Quinault Indian Nation has a resort in North Beach and a long history in the region. Ocean Shores should partner with the Quinault to highlight the history and culture of the area.
- *More prominent visitor center* – The visitor center is currently located inside the convention center. Visitors frequently don't know where to go for information about Ocean Shores or where to find somebody from the visitor center to help them with their trip. The visitor center needs to make every effort to ensure that it is prominent, easy to find, and positioned to help visitors explore Ocean Shores and the surrounding area.

DIVERSIFY TOURISM MARKETING

Historically, Ocean Shores has embraced a tourism marketing strategy that focuses on affordable family-friendliness. Its market image embodies elements of a vacation-getaway and a resort spot that appeals to leisure and vacation customers. It is often highly beneficial for multiple business types because they know their market base and can provide diverse amenities and attractions that appeal to that base with relative ease. This "destination-niche" market focus is relevant to Ocean Shores during all months of the year and has many positive aspects that are valued by the community. However, there is evidence to suggest that excess usage of this strategy can lead to unintended consequences, such as uneven supply and demand, job-scarcity in the shoulder season, and labor shortages in the peak season.

A diverse tourism marketing strategy would continue to embrace the existing image that the community has created. It also seeks to highlight additional businesses, ecosystems, natural resources, cultural assets, communities, aesthetics, and built infrastructure. The community should work to identify and highlight additional assets that typically have not been prioritized, improve existing assets, create new assets that will improve the area, and give people a reason to visit and come back for more.

It's not always what you have that you are marketing, but also how you market it. Ocean Shores has typically embraced a traditional marketing strategy that is missing many potential visitors. While it's not feasible to simultaneously do all marketing strategies, pick one or two new marketing methods and focus on them for a year or two until you become comfortable with them and then expand again to new platforms. Marketing approaches might include working with an influencer, creating a visitor's guide for the city, creating destination videos and posting to an active social media presence, or highlighting user-generated content.

There are many different options available for both what to market and how to market it. This can be a little overwhelming and result in paralysis—believing the task is too difficult and falling back to what is known and comfortable. The key here is that you don't have to do everything, and you don't have to do it all at once. Be intentional, and create a marketing plan that will move you toward diversifying the city's tourism marketing.

INCREASE BUSINESS COHESION

Ocean Shores has struggled with creating a strong business community, and the recent dissolution of the Chamber of Commerce has hampered efforts to organize behind a common vision. There exists a scarcity mentality, where businesses believe that if a visitor spends money in one location, they won't spend money at another location. It creates a culture where businesses have their own interests in mind, not necessarily the community's broader interests or the experience of the tourist. In small rural contexts such as Ocean Shores, business communities need to work together to bring a renewed economic vision to life. This is especially relevant to community resilience. When there is a large external shock, such as we are experiencing with Covid-19, community cohesion increases the ability of that community to recover more quickly. Transparent communication, inclusion, and community-wide involvement are often the predictors for economic resilience in rural areas. Community resilience is created when groups resolve their differences and agree to work together towards a common goal.

Finding a way to create a cohesive business community was identified early on in the process, and a business association has already been created. The benefit of a business association is that it brings the business com-

munity together to coordinate, communicate, network, and share ideas. The new business association should be sure to identify target members and criteria for joining. While an “everyone is welcome” mentality is most inclusive, it is important that members have some skin in the game and want to ensure the new association’s success. It is important to formalize the mission, vision, and goals of the organization. The association should also become a legal entity, which can create limited liability, tax benefits, and eligibility for grants. Ultimately, the new business association exists to serve the needs of the business community and should be adaptive and responsive to those needs. In addition to traditional business needs, an effective business association will also create a culture of community and togetherness, such as sponsoring friendly business competitions that also enhance the community at large and coordinate efforts around themed events that draw visitors into the community. The association should incentivize and reward businesses that support a strong community and develop local supply chains that allow for higher quality products and experiences for visitors.

ENHANCE IDENTITY AND THEME

The identity of Ocean Shores is as family-friendly, beach getaway. However, this identity is not necessarily translated into how visitors experience Ocean Shores. There is no consistent theme to experience as you walk down the street. Many businesses are located in strip malls that feel like Anytown, USA. Examples of towns that have embraced a theme include Leavenworth, which transformed itself into a Bavarian paradise from almost nothing (and no German heritage of significance), and Seabrook, which has adopted a Cape Cod architecture. Within Ocean Shores, there are some examples of businesses that have embraced the local beach theme such as Sharky’s, which has become a must-stop location for a photo opportunity; the Lighthouse restaurant; and Oyhut Bay, which started with a blank slate to create a themed village on the south end of the peninsula.

Ocean Shores should find ways to create a comprehensive beach-themed community in targeted locations. Some ideas have been noted earlier in the document, but might include light posts that line the main commercial district with a sandcastle motif, a location that highlights local beach-themed art, or chainsaw figu-

rines of sea creatures strategically located throughout town that serve as a scavenger hunt and photo opportunity. The idea is not to create a homogenous community where everything looks the same, but to create an experience that draws people into the character and charm of a beachfront town. It benefits the community of Ocean Shores to embrace its beach theme with the pride it deserves but to also embrace other characteristics that resonate with the whole community.

REDUCE THE SHOULDER SEASON

When it comes to seasonality, it is important to note that this is a problem that will never go away. There will always be some time during the year that sees less economic activity as it relates to tourism than the rest of the year. Acknowledging that, seasonality can be mitigated to some extent, and energy should be focused on adapting and compensating for this phenomenon.

One method for compensating for seasonality includes extending the season through price manipulation. These decisions are made at the business level, and many businesses in Ocean Shores are already engaging in this activity, as noted in the survey responses. Another option is to provide attractions that draw people in during the slow season. This can take many different forms, but primarily consists of festivals, competitions, or displays that either bring people in from the inclement weather or embraces it. Increasing the number of events that draw visitors to the area was frequently mentioned in the survey responses. However, it is important to focus on quality before focusing on quantity. Creating high-quality experiences for visitors will make them want to come back and visit again and again.

There are also less feasible options, such as completely changing the reason that people visit the area. Instead of a beach community, visitors might come to experience something that is yet-to-be-determined. One example is Atlantic City, which changed itself from a health resort to a gambling and performance mecca. Another option is to provide something unique or prestigious that visitors can only get by coming to your city. This might include a theme park, large human-made structures or landscapes (e.g., Mt. Rushmore), or having a luxury resort with significant amenities. These options are less likely and require considerable investment.

INCREASE WEB PRESENCE

When researching where to go and what to do, the first thing most tourists do is go online to do some research. They can also do this spontaneously during their trip, such as when deciding where to go for a meal. They want to know what's available, what it looks like, what others think about it, etc. Many businesses in Ocean Shores do not have a website where people can go and get this information. Many sites are out of date, boring, challenging to use, or don't provide useful information, and most don't have an online store. Many businesses only have a presence through social media such as Facebook, but then rarely use that resource to communicate with potential customers. This is also a risk as social media has a tendency to fall in and out of favor and might only be used by specific demographics. It's a lot of work to set up online resources correctly. Many people give up due to frustration or after realizing the time commitment needed to maintain that online presence. However, businesses that do not embrace an online marketplace are missing out on many potential opportunities. One barrier to more widespread adoption of some of these tools is lack of access to broadband internet services. Businesses in Ocean Shores would benefit from increasing their web presence. It would be beneficial to make a concerted and coordinated effort, which might include contracting for IT support and providing training on how to use and maintain an online presence once it has been developed.

CREATE MEMORABLE EXPERIENCES

Ocean Shores is a beach destination. However, there are lots of those, so why would somebody choose to come to Ocean Shores instead of elsewhere. It will be because Ocean Shores provides an experience that they can't get somewhere else. Tourism is becoming more about the experience than the destination. Experiential tourism is when a person visits to experience a place through its history, people, culture, food, and environment. These experiences can be natural and provided with little-to-no effort, such as going to the beach. They can also be manufactured and require significant investment, such as Disneyland. It's important to take stock of how Ocean Shores is providing experiences to its visitors and to put energy towards making those experiences as positive and memorable as possible.

ALIGN WITH REGIONAL PARTNERS

Ocean Shores provides an excellent destination for tourists with easy access to the beach and lots of hotel beds and camping nearby. This makes it a great home base for visitors to the coast and can bolster local tourism businesses. When tourists come to the coast, they will stay longer and have deeper connections and experiences if they venture outside Ocean Shores to the numerous nearby amenities. Visitors have the opportunity to visit the Quinalt Beach Resort and Casino, check out what Seabrook has to offer, hike through the Olympic Peninsula, immerse themselves in the culture and history of local Tribes, grab a charter boat out of Westport, investigate the birthplace of Nirvana's Kurt Cobain, visit a local winery, and much more. It is important to recognize the local partners that make the coast such a great place to live and to visit. By aligning itself with regional partners, Ocean Shores can benefit substantially through increased tourism activity and higher quality experiences.

CREATE A TOURISM CIVIC GROUP

While there are existing civic groups in Ocean Shores, each group has its area of focus and way to address public concerns and promote the quality of the community. The purpose of this group would be to coordinate volunteers around tourism activities and beautification of the community. Potential focus areas might include supporting information kiosks, handing out litter bags to people to clean up after a Fourth of July celebration, planning and executing the various festivals and events that draw tourists into the area, maintaining floral arrangements in high traffic areas, or coordinating efforts around enhancing the beach theme around town. The primary goal would be to support efforts that move tourism objectives forward, but don't typically fall under the responsibility of the other groups or organizations.

BUILD COMMUNITY CAPITAL

There are numerous recommendations in this report on how Ocean Shores can increase its economic resilience by investing in its tourism economy. However, moving from ideas to action is often difficult and requires resources of time and money. This report provides broad ideas, but these ideas need additional exploration and decision making around the specifics of what they would look like, how they would be executed, and who would be responsible for ensuring they are completed. There are recommendations to create a business association and a community civic group. These organizations will exist alongside the City of Ocean Shores and the convention center to create the tourism town they want. Each group should have formal roles and responsibilities. It is less important which group is responsible for specific tasks, but rather that everyone knows who is accountable for them. The organizations should have regular meeting times and be held accountable through some form of oversight. In addition, these groups should form a Tourism Working Group that meets to coordinate efforts between groups and ensure that everyone is working towards a common goal. Representation on the Tourism Working Group should also include representation from those regional partners mentioned earlier.

To help each of these groups be successful both independently and together, it is important that they operate effectively. Training in how to lead productive meetings can help move conversations along and create goals that are specific, measurable, action oriented, realistic, and time bound (SMART) and that result in completed projects and move towards economic resilience. Training should also be provided in grant writing and seeking outside funding sources, as lack of funding is a frequent stumbling block for moving projects forward. Additional training may be identified and executed once these groups are up and running. The idea is to provide these groups with the skills they need to be successful in moving forward.

Conclusion

Rural communities often make progress in small, incremental steps that can be undone in an instant from circumstances outside their control. Events such as the Great Recession or the Covid-19 global pandemic can have serious negative economic repercussions. While urban areas seem to recover more quickly, rural towns often languish, trying to recapture what they've lost. Ocean Shores has a great opportunity and potential to increase economic resilience and lessen some of the effects caused by economic disruptions and seasonality caused by its tourism-based economy. Hopefully, this report provides insight into the concerns and priorities of the Ocean Shores community around tourism. It also provides actionable recommendations that can be taken towards increasing economic resilience.

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