HORNBY ISLAND COVID COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

APRIL 11, 2021

OFFERED BY:

HIRRA, IN COLLABORATION WITH HICEEC, HORNBY/DENMAN HEALTHCARE, HIES, AND THE HORNBY ISLAND CO-OP.

WITH INPUT FROM:

THE RESILIENCE INITIATIVE AND HERON ROCKS FRIENDSHIP CENTRE



IIMAGES BY RAE MATÉ

ABOUT COVID COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Few of us would have ever imagined that we would live through a global pandemic in our lifetime. Collectively, we are living through a significant event that is impacting our physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual health. In addition to how we are affected personally, this also has great implications for our roles at work and in our community.

COVID Community Conversations were first developed and offered as a collaboration between NewStories and the Comox Valley Community Health Network in June, 2020. We wanted to provide an opportunity for community members to come together virtually and "debrief" their experiences of the pandemic after experiencing social isolation for the first time in the early months of COVID-19.

We designed these sessions for people to be in connection with one another through meaningful conversations, to pause and make meaning of these complex times, and, importantly, to generate recommendations and ideas for action, together. The policy and action recommendations are intended to inform next steps and provide guidance from lived experience on the approach and work of people and organizations who have an active role in pandemic response and recovery - as we continue with the COVID-19 response *and* as we look towards a post-pandemic world.

HORNBY ISLAND COVID COMMUNITY CONVERSATION DESIGN ADVISORY

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IMAGES

Generously Provided by Rae Maté

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These sessions were imagined, hosted, and stewarded - with respect, gratitude and humility - from the unceded traditional territory of the K'omoks First Nation.

THE HORNBY ISLAND CONVERSATION

"I felt the meeting was a positive first step, but we need to do a lot more work."

"Overall, it was great getting together to see what other people in the community are dealing with and feeling. I didn't agree with everyone and I didn't expect to. I came in wanting to learn about other perspectives and informing my own, which is what I gained out of our time on Sunday. I appreciated the smaller groups because it meant everyone spoke for a change. In larger meetings it is always a vocal minority who is heard. Thanks to everyone involved."

"The groups I participated with were all very insightful. Excellent, and respectful, dialoguing. Thanks for helping Hornby with this conversation."

In the Fall of 2020, the Hornby Island Residents' and Ratepayers' Association (HIRRA) was asked to organize a community discussion forum to reflect on the intense pandemic summer. After hearing about the COVID Community Conversations in the Comox Valley, HIRRA recognized the opportunity to respond to the community's forum request by hosting a Hornby COVID Community Conversation.

The session was originally scheduled for March 28th, but a wind storm knocked out the power on most of the Island just as the Community Conversation was about to begin! In the Hornby way of resilience and adaptability, after a few quick phone calls to assess the situation and to establish the extent of the power outage, we rescheduled the session for Sunday, April 11, 2021. More than 100 people registered, and about 70 people attended the session.

After introductions and an orientation to our time together, we reviewed a timeline of global, provincial, and local pandemic-related events and milestones. Hornby Islanders captured their unique experience of the pandemic with their own detailed timeline of key events. This timeline is attached to the end of this report.

Then, we invited participants to engage in three rounds of conversations in small breakout groups of three to four people:

- 1 Sharing stories and experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic, including things like key events and important conversations or decisions.
- 2 Reflecting on stories heard in the first round, noting what was surprising, any themes they noticed and questions that were arising.
- 3 Arriving at their "calls to action," considering what inspiring ideas to carry forward, and imagining what a "big leap" forward could look like

This report provides a taste of the Community Conversation with recommendations shared throughout.

The majority of the recommendations are from community members during the Community Conversation. The facilitators have also included recommendations about arts resilience, connecting the arts with community health and wellbeing, and collective ceremonies for processing grief.

*Note that quotes have been lightly edited for clarity and to protect anonymity throughout.

THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS SUMMARY

Eight themes emerged from the Community Conversation:

- "We're Not All in the Same Boat, But it's the Same Storm"
- The Importance of the Arts, Nature, Community
- "We're All In This Together"
- Languishing Mental Health
- Concern for Families With Young Children and Youth
- Food Security, Affordable Housing, Water Sustainability, and Climate Change
- The Tourism Conundrum
- "Perspectives are diverse, but hopefully not divisive"
- Concern for the Future

Some of the recommendations include:

- More engagement with families with young children and youth;
- Creating a Climate Action plan for Hornby;
- Creating an Affordable Housing plan for Hornby;
- Considering changes to Islands Trust bylaws regarding housing;
- Considering how to reduce car dependency;
- Exploring how arts connect with mental health and resilience.

"WE'RE NOT ALL IN THE SAME BOAT, BUT IT'S THE SAME STORM"



OUR STORIES

"The day everything changed was when the Coop closed. I live without electricity and with no running water, so I had been relying on grocery shopping every day. It was a catastrophe. I had been working at odd jobs for elderly residents and all jobs were cancelled within a week. I hadn't filed taxes for a few years and was now unemployed. It was terrifying. But it became a busy summer of life on Hornby. People wanted a house cleaner that wasn't partying at the beach and there were very few in that category. I worked 14 days straight and it was exhausting....It has been transformative. A time to get my life together. I've even developed some hobbies. The pandemic is weirdly one of the best things that has ever happened to me."

There was a diversity of experiences and life impacts with COVID-19 for Hornby Islanders. For some people, adjusting to life in a pandemic has meant significant change to day-to-day life, ranging from loss of jobs, loss of loved ones, to loss of travel and career opportunities. For others, life has changed very little or in ways that feel mostly insignificant.

Participants noticed a discrepancy between people with adequate housing and emotional security and those who do not have good housing and connections.

Many participants expressed a desire to understand how to attend to the needs of the marginalized while also staying safe as a community. Worry and fear about contracting COVID-19 was pervasive, particularly for those with household members in jobs with direct contact with the public. These fears were exacerbated by the influx of visitors and tourists, and the recognition that Hornby Island is a remote community with finite and limited resources.

"I was out of the country when the pandemic started. I would be normally VERY actively traveling and now I'm not able to. I miss music and theatre and cultural events, and being involved in organizations."

"I work over the Internet. I saw the pandemic coming and wasn't surprised, and my job wasn't affected. I live with my wife (who also kept working) so we did not feel isolated. I'm an introvert, so I'm not troubled by social withdrawal. Overall, life changed very little. The most obvious change was that the cleaning person was not coming, so our house was getting dirtier."

"My immediate family is far away. I'm elderly and I cannot go to visit. Will I ever be able to see them before they can't remember me or I pass away?

The increased use of Zoom for meetings and connecting with others was significant for many participants. Many people noted that they were able to be much more involved and that contact with others had improved with so many things moving to online platforms. People are anticipating the arrival of access to reliable high-speed internet options.

There was at least one person present who asserted that the pandemic did not exist and other participants expressed a lot of concern and curiosity about how to effectively engage with people with different opinions.

Recommended Actions

- Continue to use tools like Zoom to provide engagement opportunities for people who may not be able to attend meetings and gatherings in-person.
- Host a well-facilitated dialogue to better understand diverse perspectives about COVID-19 with dignity and compassion.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS, NATURE, COMMUNITY



Whether it was appreciating more dog walks on the beach, having time in the garden, or concern expressed for artists -- the arts, nature, and community came through as central to Hornby Island culture, spirit, and wellness. Many participants are mourning the loss of art and theatre events, and socializing.

Recommended Actions

• Create something like an "Arts Resilience Plan" to ensure access to the arts even in times of community disruption.

"I've missed community celebrations for memorials and birthdays."

"It has been a stressful and sad time for my family.

I am very concerned for the artists on the island.

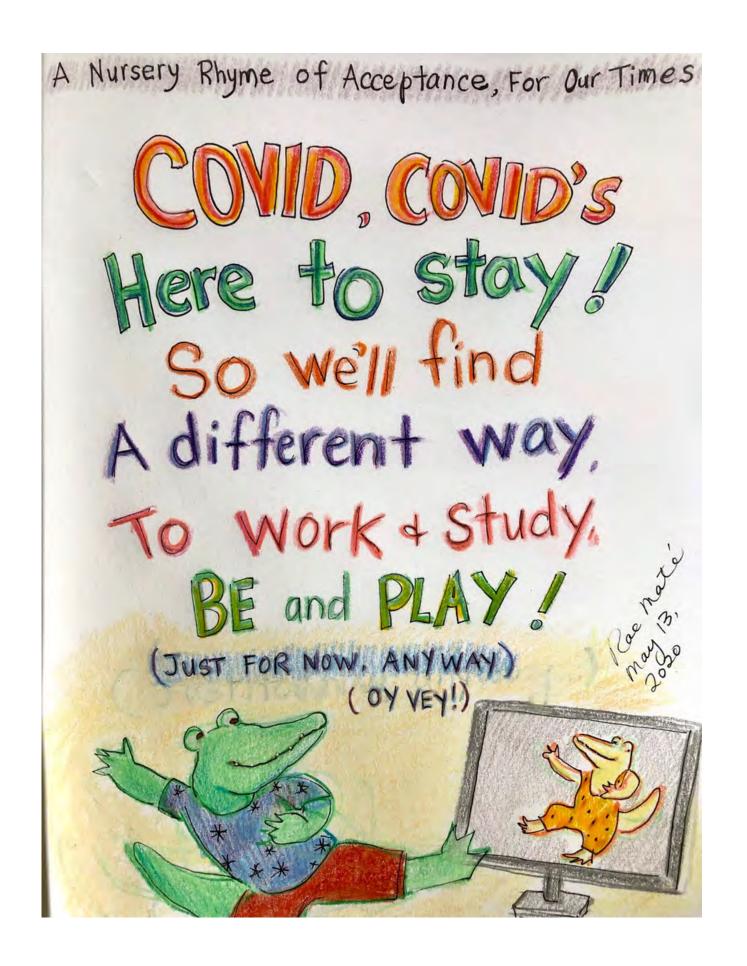
This is a hard time for them financially as they are selling much work through art shows and studio visits."

"It's been a long winter. I appreciate sitting outside with friends now that the weather is better."

"I'm looking forward to getting back to playing music and connecting with friends."

"Inspiration for artistic work – painting, drawing - has come from quiet COVID time. Art reaches the soul."

"WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER"



"[A woman's] message of thanks to our community, and how well we are all doing was inspiring. How she has been pining to be here, but hasn't come as she doesn't want to bring anything to her precious island. As human beings, when we are complimented, we all try harder. Her heartfelt story elevated today's conversation for me, out of despair, to a place of light."

"I'm inspired that the community is staying strong and vibrant and that people are looking after each other. Because we have had 'normal' stripped away, people are more vulnerable and open with each other. We have more empathy for other people. People are looking to see how they can help their neighbours and friends. There is a growing sense that we're all in this together."

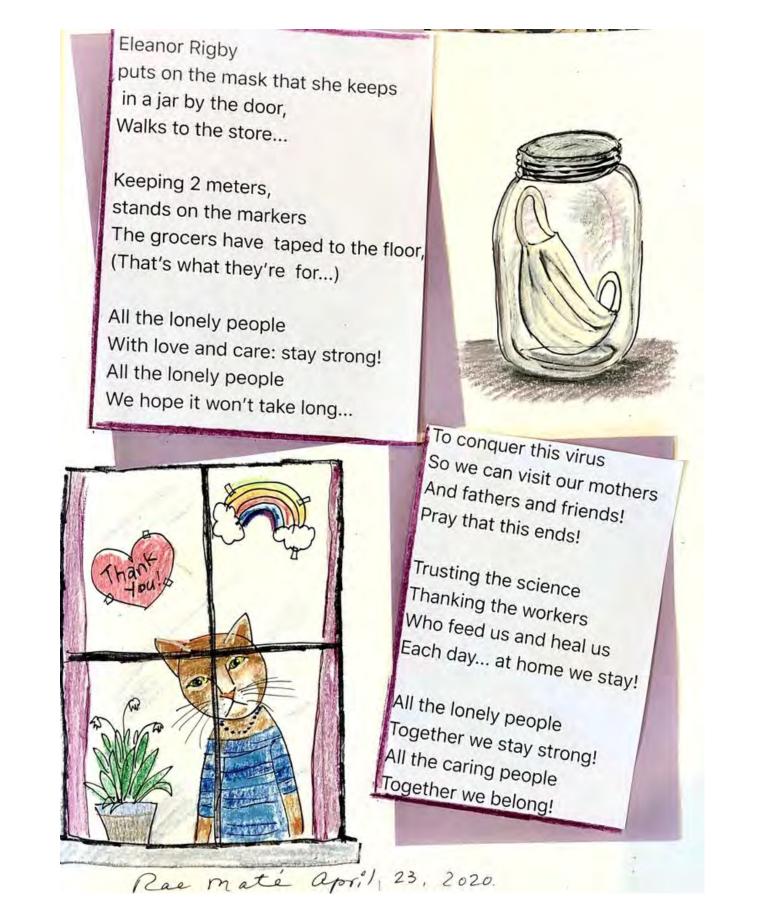
There was a key moment during the Community Conversation when a homeowner whose primary homebase is in another community shared that she has not visited Hornby since the pandemic was declared for the fear of unknowingly bringing COVID-19 to her "precious" Island. Her outpouring of love for the community and for Hornby's lands and waters created a noticeable ripple of positivity, hope, and perspective shift.

When invited to consider what folks are feeling inspired by and would like to hold onto, even as we orient towards pandemic recovery, many participants noted how caring, generous, and resilient people are in the community.

Recommended Actions

- Consider how to support and integrate a "culture of appreciation" into the policies and practices of Hornby community and organizational life.
- Keep working on the Reconciliation process and consider how Reconciliation is also with self and the environment. Find small and concrete steps that we can actually do.

LANGUISHING MENTAL HEALTH



One of the paradoxes that arose around being more than a year into a global pandemic was being both deeply appreciative and grateful for the abundance of Hornby Island life while also being mentally exhausted or "soul tired". The ongoing stresses of managing life in a pandemic, missing a more dynamic and layered life, and feeling the loss of human touch and social connection can all contribute to feelings of anxiety, sadness and depression, and pandemic fatigue.

There are a number of free adult mental health supports and services available and a list is included at the end of this report.

While there are some fairly commonly recommended self-care practices - such as staying active, eating healthy, practicing mindfulness and meditation, reducing multi-tasking - Hornby Islanders may want to consider a more holistic and community-based approach that includes collective care.

Recommended Actions

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- Create something like a "Community Health and Resilience Plan". Include artists and other stewards of community health and wellness. Consider how the arts might be more fulsomely integrated into health and wellness response, future disaster response, and to daily life.
- Consider working with artists to integrate the arts into an Island-wide mourning and/or healing ceremony as a response to pandemic times and future disruptions.

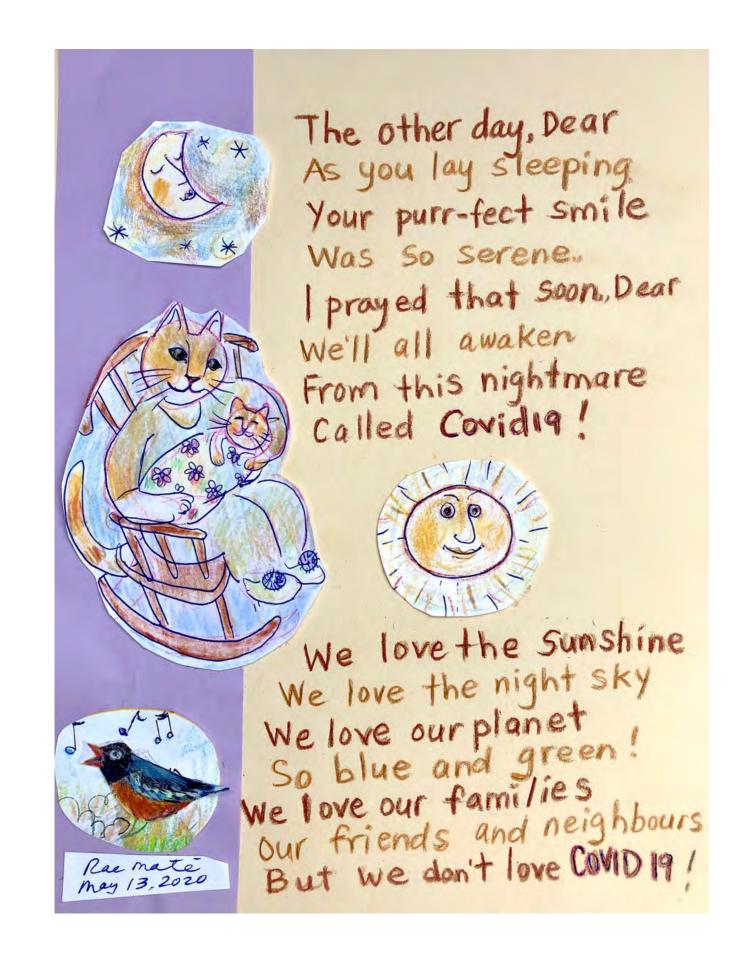
"The past year has been marked by timelessness – hard to know what day it is, what month it is. I am a social animal and I'm missing the layered world – there are no gatherings, no visiting places, people just skitter past each other."

"We have kids at home. I'm trying to work and my wife is in a front-line job. I am under enormous stress. For the last 10 months, this background stress. It's still hard, and I'm struggling with mental health....There is uncertainty on the horizon. This has taken a great personal toll."

"I'm not necessarily feeling charitable. It is a challenge dealing with day to day life."

"I have not touched another person since last March. Not having that contact is really interesting. I had a huggy community and that's gone. That's what has been really noticeable for me."

CONCERN FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN AND YOUTH



"My day to day life has not been that affected.

The hardest part is seeing my 18 year old daughter graduating this year from high school with no ceremony, no grandparents coming to cheer her, and no prom. One year doesn't make that much difference in my life, but watching an 18 year old who can't wear her prom dress..."

"It's hard to not be able to visit with my grandchildren. Although COVID has been a stressful health concern for older people it has be even more stressful for young families and for young people in general: losing their jobs, having to move into cheaper accommodation or back home, not having any social life, having to work with the kids at home during the school closures, children not being able to pursue sports activities or play with friends..."

There were not many families with young children or many youth present during the COVID Community Conversation but there was plenty of concern about how the pandemic was impacting them.

Recommended Actions

- Consider hosting Community Conversations for families with young children and with youth, or other focused outreach, to better understand the impacts of the pandemic, to find meaningful ways to provide support, and to ensure their voices are included.
- Support the interviews with young people that are already being done by the Resilience Initiative.

FOOD SECURITY, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, WATER SUSTAINABILITY, AND CLIMATE CHANGE



Housing, sustainable water, food security, climate change, and Reconciliation were all identified as key issues for Hornby Island.

Many people noted that the Kitchen - which provides meals for free or at a nominal cost to community members - was vital during this time and is important to hold onto.

Recommended Actions

- Create a Climate Action, Water Sustainability, and Food Security plan for Hornby Island.
- Explore how to provide infrastructure for temporary housing e.g. summer workers camping out.
- Create a long-range housing affordability plan for Hornby. Include more housing possibilities such as houses with suites and live-work buildings.
- Make better use of temporary-use permits so two dwellings are allowed on a property, taking water and septic into consideration.
- Create an intermediate care place for those who need more than home care.
- Consider if non-conforming/2nd dwellings used as short-term vacation rentals (STVRs) should have the same bylaws applied as those housing year-round residents.
- Modernize Island Trust mindset about balancing the environment with development.
- Consider ways that visitors could be less car dependent.

"When the pandemic was declared, the environment got better really quickly. That gave me hope. If we all get together on the same page, great things can happen."

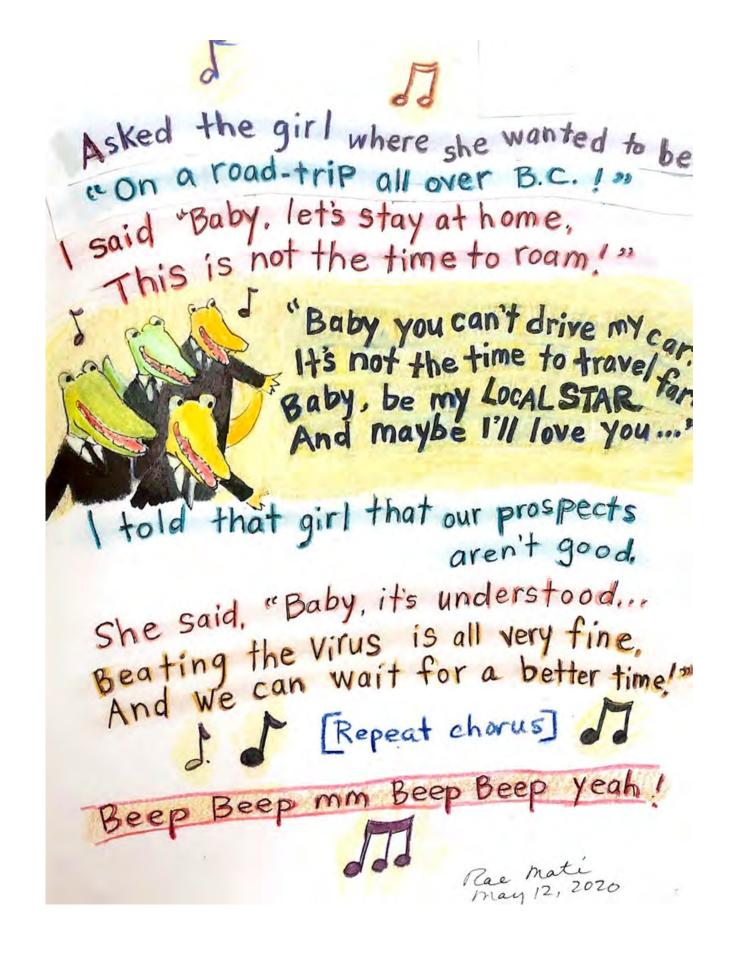
"I'm inspired by the community garden and the fact that so much is shared with the Kitchen and other groups."

"We have to decide whether this will be a place just for rich people to have vacation homes, or if it will be somewhere that people can live and raise families."

"Islands Trust needs to work more closely on land issues and housing to make sure there is suitable land and housing for those that live here, especially young people (young families, workers, etc.)."

"One dwelling per property is a problem with a shortage of housing. I can't even build a small house on six acres of land for my mother."

THE TOURISM CONUNDRUM



"People should not just say shut down tourism, young families need work."

"I was surprised by some in the business community last summer saying on social media 'Hornby is excited to welcome you back'. My neighbourhood felt busier than it had ever been in 10 years. People were not pleased, many felt they had no voice. They were frustrated, scared....There was no consultation with the community at all, just a few people dominating social media. All voices need to be heard – elders, children, all Hornby groups. We need to hear from more voices."

"I want to advocate for working teens who camp out in summer. We can't blame people for socializing on the beach when they don't have a home to go back to. How are people who plan to profit from tourism in the midst of the pandemic going to help the people living in tents that they rely on as summer workers?" Tourism seems to be a flashpoint for all of Hornby's tensions. According to one participant, this tension dates back to the '60s.

There was general recognition that visitors would not show the level of care, respect, and reverence for the Island's environment or way of life as residents do. At the same time, some people felt that it was their responsibility to make Hornby Island available as a place for healing and restoration for others, especially city dwellers.

The key issues named during the Community Conversation were:

- Balancing the number of visitors with the Island's infrastructure capacity;
- Ensuring adequate housing for people living in community;
- Supporting environmental health and resilience with the additional pressure of visiting populations;
- Providing opportunities for jobs and economic livelihood for Islanders;
- Maintaining the health of the community during pandemic times;
- Having a coordinated approach and one clear voice for Hornby Islanders;
- Ensuring that all Islanders have input into decisions and policies.

Note that issues related to food security, affordable housing, water sustainability, and general divisiveness are captured in other sections of this report.

"There were conflicting messages from HICEEC and Islands Trust and silence from HIRRA.

Posting a red banner at the top of a picture of a huge beach and lists of available accommodation was not sufficient. A divide opened up. When we were asked not to travel, people did travel here, and they were encouraged by some in the tourist/business community. It was too many people for the fragile infrastructure of Hornby and too many people for the situation. Too many people and no sense there is a problem. The attempts I made to address my concerns were met with hostility and scorn."

"I'm frustrated by the amount of visitor traffic to Hornby. The messages from government and Hornby organizations didn't seem clear for people visiting Hornby - there seemed to be a lack of clear unified messaging for people traveling to Hornby, especially about the minimal services in remote communities."

Recommended Actions

- Conduct an assessment to ascertain how many people Hornby Island's environment, infrastructure, and community can actually support while maintaining values, health, wellness, and resilience.
- Consider capping the # of Short Term Vacation Rentals available.
- Look to other tourist communities for examples of different ways to ensure that workers have affordable and dignified housing.
- Consider how a managed tourism sector may support a richer experience for tourists while protecting Hornby's social and natural resources.
- Create a plan for how to mend the divisions between promoting tourism and lock down.
- Address how to have organizations on Hornby and organizations that impact Hornby better coordinated.
- Consider a % contribution of tourist rental income being allocated back to the community for infrastructure, gardens, housing, etc.
- Develop policies that create an environmentally sustainable tourism industry.
- Consider different ways to include tourists in addressing issues. For example, asking visitors to bring their own linens and recycling to lighten the load on local resources and infrastructure.
- HICEEC is working with local businesses to create an "Ambassador Program" for front-line workers in the community. Consider an Ambassador Program that is coordinated/directed by multiple sectors working together.

"PERSPECTIVES ARE DIVERSE, BUT HOPEFULLY NOT DIVISIVE."

Ne're gonna lay down our P.P.E.

Down by the Riverside, Down by the Riverside,

Down by the Riverside!

Ne're gonna strengthen community

Down by the Riverside.

Down by the Riverside! We ain't gonna study war no-more!

Endanger Wildlife anymore!

Endanger the Ozone anymore! Ne ain't gonna Worship cash no-more.

Ne want "Old Normal" anymore!

Don't a gonna Studies Do" aint gonna Study War no-more)

In the lead-up to the conversation, the conversation itself, as well as the comments following, it is clear that Hornby Islanders are navigating some deep divides in perspectives. This seems to have been exacerbated by social media - there were multiple comments related to the toxic nature of interactions on Facebook and Instagram, and a few suggestions to shut these social media accounts down.

Conflict on Hornby is not new, and many people have skills, knowledge, and the will to address the pervasive divisiveness. There were many comments about ensuring that conversations aren't held in silos, that conversations are inclusive and focused on finding shared values.

Recommended Actions from Community

- Host more open Zoom community conversations in a "kitchen table" style of sharing perspectives rather than all on FaceBook.
- HIRRA could host a regular "open discussion" "conversation café" Zoom meeting.
- Experiment with different ways to come together and share openly.
- Host a respectful/open conversation about HICEEC, Hornbyisland.com and public messaging.

"We don't have one problem and one solution we have many of both. We can get overly focused on one thing."

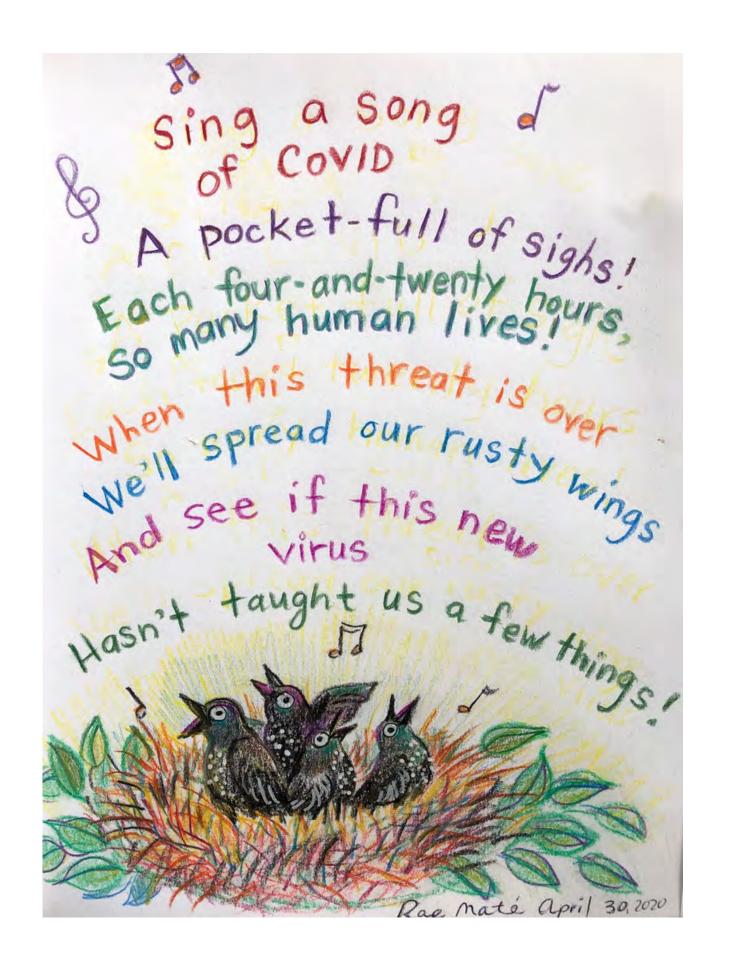
"Some things we honoured about each other before the pandemic are things we're holding against each other now. We were weirdos before, happily, but now we're holding it against each other. We need to take time to be open and talk to each other, like we used to do. We keep getting mad at each other over policies, and we should be getting constructive in making the policy that matches who we are now, not thirty years ago, as both individuals and Hornby people."

Big leap forward: just talk to each other and reach consensus on the place you want to live in.

"We all need to stop blaming."

"We need all groups to come together. We need collective action to solve the problems."

CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE



"I was hopeful at first that this pandemic would trigger a global awakening and that people would become aware of their personal impact on the planet. I am less hopeful now that a return to "normal" seems to be the goal."

"How much vaccine participation is there going to be on the island?"

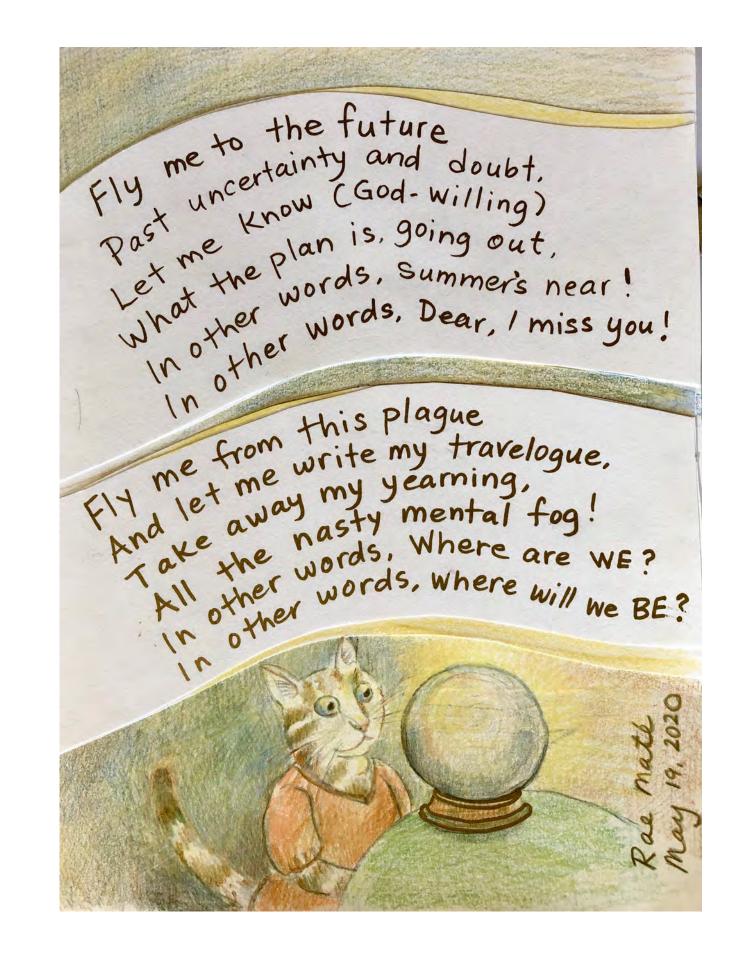
"How will the pandemic affect us long term? Will there be permanent changes?"

"How do we remember what we have learned and carry it forward?"

We don't yet know how the pandemic will affect us long term or what the future holds. At the same time, it seems likely that the future will bring more frequent disruptions and more uncertainty. Communities everywhere will be well-served by planning and preparing accordingly. Celebrating and building upon community strengths - like the arts, the Kitchen, a culture of generosity and resilience - while also facing divisiveness with compassion and curiosity, seems like a great way to prepare and orient towards a life-giving future that fits all of humanity and nature.

May this COVID Community Conversation help Hornby Islanders to remember what you have learned and inspire you to carry it forward.

ADDITIONAL MATERIALS



HORNBY ISLAND COVID-19 TIMELINE

- Free Store and School closed March 17, 2020
- Hornby core Health Service Providers (HIFR, Clinic physicians and RN, Home Care Manager, Community Paramedics) meeting by Zoom weekly starting March 17
- Hall and New Horizons closed March 18
- Co-op closed to in-person shopping Mach 18
- "Take a break" HICEEC publicity on Hornbylsland.com social media March 18 to June
 29
- "Visitors welcome...but later" article on HIRRA web-page March 19 & April First Edition
- HISTRA letter sent to members asking them to cancel visitor bookings
- "Hornby requests a break from visitors" joint press release issued March 21
- Red Banner Covid Alert on Hornbylsland.com updated every 2 weeks started March 21
- "Islands Trustees ask visitors to stay home" press release issued March 22
- HICEEC posted "don't accept visitors plea" to all accommodation providers March 23
- HICEEC organized regular Zoom meetings with businesses, Hornby groups and gov't rep's re:
 "Covid State of the Economy" started March 24
- HISTRA posted FaceBook request to all owners to cancel visitor bookings March 24

- HIRRA organized Covid Community Response
 Zoom meetings (wide range of community groups
 and service providers participating) started
 weekly on March 25
- "Don't Come From Away" poster shared on HIRRA web-page April 17
- HICEEC \$2500 grant in aid, applied for: Support network and training for Area A community
 Facebook page moderators (on Hornby: Community Connections) in April
- HISTRA meeting weekly to develop, and educate, short term rental sector on best practices for cleaning and safety protocols – April
- Regular Hornby community events cancelled:
 Blues Fest, Hornby Festival, Fall Fair
- Most Hornby organizations moved to Zoom meeting format
- Clinic not accepting walk-ins and non-resident non-emergency patients starting in May
- Co-op partially re-opened to in-person shopping June 11
- "Travel Advisory" with four-page Health Advisory and information for visitors posted on Hornbylsland.com end of June
- CVRD and Islands Trust Covid information pamphlet printed for distribution at Buckley Bay and Co-op in June

- Farmer's Market opened with restrictions in June
- HICEEC/hornbyisland.com followed PHO "cautious travel" advisory including social media posting and pinning Travel/health Advisory to the Instagram & Facebook pages July 4.
- Hall opened for some activities July 25
- High risk trail features closed and HIFR notice posted re: bike accidents and response time in Regional Parks July 25
- HISTRA contacted members re: Public Health
 Order for contact tracing July 27
- Kitchen remained open through the whole summer for the first time
- School opened to in-person instruction with restrictions Sept
- Free Store partially re-opened one day per week Nov 12
- Last Covid Community Response meeting (so far)
 Nov 19

FREE Adult Mental Health Services

- Island Health Mental Health & Substance Use Services
 Call 250-331-8524 to set up an intake appointment.
- 24-hour Vancouver Island Crisis Line

Call **1-888-494-3888**. The Crisis Line provides a supportive listening ear for people in emotional distress and connection to emergency mental health services when needed.

Crisis Chat - 6 - 10 p.m. Seven days a week Visit the Crisis Line website at www.vicrisis.ca Crisis Text - 6 - 10 p.m. Seven days a week 1-250-800-3806 from your cell phone.

- Foundry Virtual Drop-In Counselling (ages 12-24)

 Call 1-833-FØUNDRY (that's FØUNDRY with a zero! or 1-833-308-6379) to book an online, same day, single session appointment.
- Wellness Together Canada

 Visit https://ca.portal.gs/ to access online support, self-assessment, tracking, apps, resources, and counselling...
- Stronger Minds by BEACON

Visit https://www.mindbeacon.com/strongerminds to access a free, digital program to support your mental well-bring through the COVID-19 crisis.



CAN WE BUILD A BETTER SUMMER?

Your voice is important in making sense of Hornby's year of Covid pandemic and how we can move ahead together.

Join Hornby's

COVID COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

Sunday, March 28, 2021 2:00 to 4:00pm On Zoom

REGISTER: By email office@hirra.ca or phone 250-335-1842

A facilitated collaborative debrief, sharing and discussions of our experiences from this unprecedented year with a look to the future.

CALLING ALL HORNBY ISLANDERS:

Front-line and other workers, parents, business owners, elders and retirees, artists, part-time residents, vacation rental owners, high-school students, emergency services volunteers, the unemployed and marginally housed and all interested community members!

Sponsored by:

HIRRA, HICEEC, HDCHCS, HIES and Hornby Island Co-op with input from: Resilience Initiative Heron Rocks Friendship Centre Society

