



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Countywide partnership provides more than \$2.5 million in grants to support local businesses impacted by COVID-19

In total, 269 businesses will be receiving grants made possible by CARES Act funds pooled by the County and cities to boost economic recovery

Following a comprehensive review of 628 applications for the Whatcom ReStart business grant, 269 top-tier applicants were identified for funding. The maximum grant amount was \$15,000. Whatcom County and the cities of Bellingham, Lynden, Ferndale, Sumas, Everson, Nooksack and Blaine all contributed CARES Act funds to the grant program and each played an integral role in identifying the top applicants in their respective jurisdictions.

“When we started these discussions about supporting small businesses impacted by COVID-19, it quickly became clear just how interconnected our county is and how we need to pool our resources. So many of our residents live in one town or zip code but work in another,” said County Executive Satpal Sidhu. “I’m grateful to all the mayors for prioritizing cooperation and collaboration. We are achieving more together than we could ever do separately.”

The Whatcom ReStart program accepted applications from July 16 to July 31, 2020. A total of 628 applications were received. The application scoring criteria included three basic assessment categories: Adaptivity/Business Strength, Impact/Need and Community Contribution. The application review was delegated to local grant review committees to ensure local insight and involvement in the process.

“The City of Lynden is allocating approximately \$100,000 in CARES Act funding to business grants and this, combined with \$160,000 allocated by the County, allows us to provide a significant boost to nearly three dozen local businesses,” said Scott Korthuis, Mayor of Lynden. “The Regional Economic Partnership and County have been great partners in making this happen.”

The City of Bellingham, which accounts for approximately 55% of the jobs in Whatcom County, provided the largest municipal contribution of CARES Act funding to the business grant program, more than \$680,000. Together with \$1.2 million in County allocations from CARES Act funding, the program was able to offer grants to 148 businesses in and around Bellingham.

“We’re pleased to be able to provide support to many businesses countywide by pooling our resources,” Bellingham Mayor Seth Fleetwood said. “These grants will help area businesses stabilize and continue their recovery from the economic impacts of the pandemic.”

Mayor Fleetwood said that a portion of grant funds were set aside for businesses in Bellingham’s City Center and Fairhaven districts. “These are our oldest, most established commercial districts and areas that define our community’s character and health. Support directed to these economic centers, and the boost these funds will give them as we move toward COVID-19 recovery, will be felt throughout the community.”

Earlier this month, the Washington State Department of Commerce announced that the County and cities will receive additional CARES Act dollars. Mayor Fleetwood and County Executive Sidhu have said they expect to recommend to their respective councils that a portion of those funds be allocated to Whatcom ReStart so that more funding will be available to businesses.

Grant applications were received from every city and town in Whatcom County, and an intentional effort was made to ensure that the recipients were also representative of the county by geography and industry. Approximately \$440,000 was allocated to businesses in unincorporated Whatcom County. A full list of the recipients and the amounts awarded will be made available on the [Whatcom ReStart webpage](#).

"We are a resilient community. When we get knocked down, we don't complain, we get back up and try again," said Ferndale Mayor Greg Hansen. "With these resources, I believe our businesses can come back after this crisis better and stronger than before." Twenty-nine businesses in Ferndale were awarded grants, with the city government and the County contributing \$100,000 and \$130,000, respectively, from CARES Act funding.

The grants are only eligible to cover specific expenses. The list of eligible expenses is limited by conditions under which CARES Act funds are distributed. Eligible expenses include but are not limited to: rent, ordinary loan payments, employee wages and benefits, typical operating costs and COVID-19-related public health measures.

"We've only been able to fund about 40% of the applicants, and that's frustrating, because we see so many businesses and their employees impacted by this crisis," said Gina Stark, Economic Development Project Manager at the Regional Economic Partnership. "We hope that those of you who we were not able to assist at this time will continue to adapt and to make things work."

In addition to these business and economic response efforts, CARES Act funding has also been dedicated to support the public emergency response, food and housing security, childcare services, and services and facilities to those living unsheltered.

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