

WILDFIRE ECONOMIC RECOVERY COUNCIL REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

Presented to House Wildfire Recovery Committee

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Office of Governor Kate Brown

January 25, 2021

HOUSING & SHELTERING

1. Pursue statutory changes to HB 2896 (2019) to expand eligible uses of existing manufactured home park acquisition funds to allow purchase of land investment in infrastructure.
2. Provide resources to partner with Public Housing Authorities and nonprofits to acquire available land to use for manufactured home parks and/or affordable homeownership and rental housing. With a sense of urgency, securing an investment of \$10-15 million would allow OHCS and partners to begin this work this biennium. As identified in the Governor's Recommended Budget, OHCS's Land Acquisition and Manufactured Parks Program and Business Oregon's Wildfire Recovery Grants and Special Public Works Fund offer revenue streams for this purpose.

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3. Engage local governments in the wildfire impacted areas to review the potential of zoning restrictions or Rights of First Refusal regulations for manufactured home parks to ensure they are not redeveloped as homes unaffordable to prior residents. In reality, the private parks may not be as affordable to prior residents. The state, local government and non-profits must protect individuals from predatory practices as we rebuild.
4. Fully support the Oregon Community Foundation's efforts related to the \$30 million Project Turnkey Wildfire Response investment to secure units available for immediate occupancy.

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5. Along with sheltering and feeding wildfire survivors, ODHS is responsible for disaster case management and should immediately apply for FEMA's Disaster Case Management Grant Program. Many survivors are dealing with a significant number of needs and stressors such as financial, physical, or emotional well-being. Individuals who may have suffered losses not covered by state or local government programs, as well as those whose homes were damaged by the wildfires, will certainly benefit from this type of individualized case management assistance.
6. Coordinate congressional lobbying efforts for additional federal resource allocations in support of long-term housing recovery needs, including Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) assistance.

DEBRIS & CLEANUP

7. Should the state include commercial property cleanup in its Step 2 cleanup efforts at a cost to the state currently estimated at \$44 million? Yes, the state should clean up commercial properties using funds from the \$135 million set aside in the Governor's Recommended Budget for the Council. As the state and its partners begin removing hazard trees and residential structural debris in communities across Oregon, the state should support commercial businesses becoming Rebuild Ready. Commercial insurance payments may cover the cost of commercial property cleanup for some businesses. With this recommendation, the state will incur costs for any commercial properties cleaned and look to offset those costs by recovering from commercial property owners' private insurance.

DEBRIS & CLEANUP

8. Should the state remove damaged concrete foundations in its Step 2 cleanup efforts at a cost to the state currently estimated at \$21 million? Yes, the state should clean up concrete foundations damaged by the fires using funds from the \$135 million set aside in the Governor's Recommended Budget for the Council. While concrete foundations may not be eligible for FEMA reimbursement on all properties, removal of concrete foundations is necessary to support rebuilding of residential homes in fire-impacted communities. Performing cleanup work without removing concrete foundations may further delay the process of community rebuilding. However, Oregon should seek FEMA reimbursement for all possible aspects of concrete foundation removal.

DEBRIS & CLEANUP

9. Should the state clean up all Oregon homes destroyed by the Labor Day fires, regardless of FEMA eligibility? Yes, the state should clean up all destroyed residential properties, leaving properties “ready to build” if an owner requests state assistance. This recommendation would provide an equitable benefit to all homeowners impacted by these fires. It is assumed that FEMA may not approve 100% of all residential properties for debris removal, as some rural properties pose a less significant threat to public health, safety, or economic recovery. The state will incur costs for residential cleanup ineligible for FEMA reimbursement.

DEBRIS & CLEANUP

10. The Council believes a review and/or revision of state recovery plans, as well as statutory clarification on manufactured home parks destroyed in this kind of disaster, and the State Debris Management plan, is in order to capture many of the lessons observed in the wildfire cleanup. Specifically, incorporating the Right of Entry process and complications around commercial properties and manufactured housing communities. The current plan does not provide much detail around the ROE process or the legal responsibilities of park owners.

Additional information regarding a phased or stepped approach for debris (Household Hazardous Waste, then ash and other debris), and addressing hazard trees on federal property should be considered for incorporation. Clearer roles and responsibilities for the agencies and organizations identified in the plan should be added. An updated plan should also reference FEMA-ineligible debris and the process/considerations for requesting waivers from FEMA or the mechanisms for the state/local jurisdiction to assume responsibility for FEMA-ineligible debris.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

11. Secure \$50 million from the \$135 million in funds set aside in the Governor's Recommended Budget for the Council to fully leverage FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, prioritizing mitigation initiatives to reduce risk of wildfires and associated hazards such, as flooding and landslides. Communities impacted by recent wildfires should also be prioritized for funding.
12. Acknowledge local capacity challenges and address the diminished tax base and supplement locally assessed property tax revenue to assist local governments in pursuing their core missions.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

13. The 2020 wildfire season has negatively impacted many elements of municipal infrastructure, including water/wastewater systems, municipal building, and community facilities. Attention needs to be afforded, not only to local human capacity to effectuate recovery, but to short- and long-term financing options. The state should form a Wildfire Community Capacity and Financing Team to assist impacted municipalities with navigating public rebuilding efforts.
14. Expand OEM staff to include regional members with a focus on wildfire preparedness, response coordination, hazard mitigation, and recovery. Coordination of assistance from FEMA requires time and expertise to the detriment of other vital recovery functions. Benefits will accrue to communities and its residents, as well as better collaboration with counties as they respond to wildfire disaster events.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

15. Provide wildfire impacted school districts funding security and stability for at least three years. Pursue legislation to create a school district stabilization fund of \$7.5 million as their communities rebuild.
16. Without state assistance, cities that were devastated by the wildfires will be forced to cut services just as their residents need them the most. The state should consider backfilling fire impacted cities and special districts' short-term property tax and other revenue losses.
17. The Beachie Creek Fire compromised efforts underway to improve the sewer and water quality infrastructure in the North Santiam Canyon. The project is at a critical juncture in the recovery effort. The Council recommends an investment of \$10 million from the Special Works Fund to accelerate this project forward.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

18. The Council appreciates and strongly supports the investment to fund a statewide alert system for notification to Oregonians related to COVID-19 updates, wildfires, natural disasters, and other warnings and alerts. The Council has heard from individuals about the complete lack of, or at best the inconsistent, access to multi-lingual emergency communications, alerts, and warnings during the Labor Day wildfires. Put simply, the need to alert residents of dangers from these unprecedented disasters has never been greater.
19. Multilingual, multicultural services must be strengthened to ensure all voices are heard and communicated with (written or oral) in a culturally appropriate manner and language. The Council supports additional resources be made available to ensure appropriate translation services are provided for communities impacted by disasters. In addition, emergency alert notifications need to be translated into languages other than English.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

20. Underground utilities and broadband access opportunities. Wildfire impacts to utility infrastructure were widespread. If above ground utilities were damaged in the wildfires and are to be repair or replaced, the cost to underground can be included in the repair cost through FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Program (see Recommendation #11), provided the benefit/cost analysis results in a positive evaluation. This provides an opportunity to expand broadband in the impacted areas.

The Governor's Recommend Budget includes funding the Broadband Office in Business Oregon to coordinate broadband infrastructure deployment, \$100 million for broadband service infrastructure loans and grants, and broadband service assistance. Additionally, the recently passed omnibus COVID-19 Relief bill allocated \$7 billion to increase access to broadband services for families with low incomes, rural addresses, and homes on Tribal lands. The state should aggressively pursue funding elements in the bill, including the \$1 billion to support those living on Tribal lands, plus \$300 million to bring broadband to rural communities.

The Council strongly encourages Business Oregon and the state to work with the federal government and both public and private utilities to explore and make investments to ensure access to broadband services and underground utilities and coordinate the placement of broadband fiber in wildfire-impacted communities.

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21. The fires have brought both economic and humanitarian costs to the state, Tribes individuals, and businesses. The state should pursue a contract for an independent economist to perform work related to wildfire impacts to key business and economic sectors. Economic impacts can either be direct, where losses are the direct consequence of the fire, or indirect, where changes in business and consumer demand affect specific sectors. New data collection efforts, or a compiling of existing data sources, may be needed to support this effort.

RECOVERY & REBUILDING

22. **Workforce/Equal Employment Opportunity.** The state's goal is to create a qualified, broad-based workforce and a diverse pool of prime contractors. Additionally, the state must optimize opportunities for subcontractors to ensure that the benefits of any construction work are shared among the whole community. The state must actively engage the subcontracting community to help grow opportunities for minorities, women, and small businesses on all of its projects. The state must meet the workforce challenges of today as well as the future, thus it must partner with industry groups to achieve high levels of apprenticeship opportunities on its projects. Finally, it is the responsibility of all state contracting agencies to make sure that workplaces are free from all forms of harassment and provide programs to assist members of equal employment opportunity groups to overcome past or present disadvantage or discrimination.

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23. In the Governor's Recommended Budget significant investments are directed to agencies responsible for safe and effective fire suppression and response. The Council wants it understood that this level of financial investment must come with accountability obligations for these agencies to implement financial and performance management oversight tools to ensure all objectives are understood and achieved and that all are held accountable to clear and consistent performance metrics.

