

Dear Residents of Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands,

We are living through unprecedented times. The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has prompted a society-wide mobilization previously seen only in wartime. Public guidelines are being revised daily and the pace of change can feel overwhelming. It may be difficult to understand who is in charge and what is being done to keep our families and island communities safe.

The Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Bonnie Henry, is leading pandemic planning and response across BC. She has declared a provincial health emergency and ordered the closure of schools, restaurants and personal service businesses, restricted mass gatherings, and ordered international travellers to self-isolate. These orders are not suggestions. Our communities require 100% compliance for measures to be effective and violations should be referred to the police non-emergency line. Island Health and their local resources such as the Lady Minto Hospital are coordinating COVID-19 testing, treatment, and the continued delivery of regular health care services.

The Provincial Government has declared a separate state of emergency which gives it authority over the movement of people, supply chains, and rationing. There are Federal and Provincial economic relief programs to help those impacted by the pandemic and details are available on their respective websites. Our local Chambers of Commerce, CRD economic development commissions, and service organizations are helping businesses and vulnerable population with these programs.

Local governments take direction from the Provincial Health Officer during pandemics. The Capital Regional District is the local government for Salt Spring and the Southern Gulf Islands and has activated their Emergency Operations Centre to provide a clear chain-of-command for COVID-19 communication and decision-making. The Provincial Health Officer has instructed the CRD to ensure essential services such as water, sewage, solid waste, transportation, and fire response are not interrupted by staff absences caused by sickness or family care needs. The CRD's on-island emergency programs are helping coordinate community, neighbourhood, and fire responder groups, and are in regular communication with health representatives and other critical infrastructure providers such as BC Ferries, BC Transit, BC Hydro, MOTI and the RCMP. The Capital Regional District are posting real-time updates on the local situation to social media, the Salt Spring Exchange, and the CRD website.

Although the federal government has barred international and non-essential US visits, there is no Provincial directive to restrict travel to the southern gulf islands. Locally elected CRD directors, Islands Trust officials, Chambers of Commerce, and the newly formed Southern Gulf Islands Tourism Partnership are advising visitors to defer trips to our area until the pandemic has passed.

Most importantly, we all need to take care of ourselves and each other over the coming weeks. Stay at home when possible, practice social distancing by maintaining 2 metres distance from others, wash your hands frequently, and look out for those around you who may be vulnerable. COVID-19 is highly contagious and spreads exponentially; even small changes in our behavior will save lives and help us make good use of finite health resources.

This will be a long and difficult response. If you suspect you may be sick, please self-isolate and use BC's online COVID-19 self-assessment tool. If you have non-medical questions, call 1-888-COVID19 or text 604.630.0300. On behalf of our entire community, we want to express our deep appreciation and

thanks to our health providers and those in the public and private sectors that continue to provide essential services in these extraordinary times.

Signed,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gary Holman".

Gary Holman

Director, Salt Spring Island Electoral Area

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "David Howe".

David Howe

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