

OPAL's Paradox: Years of Experience and Yet Also Beginners

By Lisa Byers, Executive Director

In 2025 I felt the paradox of being part of a seasoned team who accomplished a lot, and yet, also beginning a new chapter of organizational restructuring over the next two to four years so the next generation can carry on OPAL's mission far into the future.

First, the accomplishments.

The most noteworthy endeavor was not even on our work plan at the beginning of the year. In January, I received a call from Luke Keel, who, together with his dad, Tom Keel, and Tom's partner, Tina Leavitt, owned a property with eight apartments. They wanted the apartments to keep providing year-round housing that was affordable, and they wanted OPAL to buy the property. After a thorough feasibility analysis and with strong financial support from the community, including a large, unexpected anonymous donation, OPAL purchased the Crosswind Apartments in December.

On Kidder Way, just east of the medical center, OPAL's team constructed 10 new townhomes. Homebuyers purchased their homes in the first few months of 2026. This is the first time that OPAL used the condominium legal structure, which required adapting myriad documents to the community land trust approach.

A hallmark of OPAL's success has been housing counseling and homebuyer education services that are essential for homebuyers' success. When the federal government cut that funding, the Orcas community came through during the Community Foundation's GiveOrcas campaign to keep that service going.

After diligent work by staff members and professional designers, the Pea Patch Community Campus received approval from the county to proceed with site work necessary to subdivide the property. The process included a midyear redesign after the Orcas Community Resource Center decided to purchase its existing building instead of building on the new campus. The county's approval

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More than 140 people attended the ground turning event on the Pea Patch Community Campus. Kids planted daffodils on the knoll next to the site where 20 new townhomes are scheduled to start taking shape in September.

Many Thanks to Our Generous Supporters

Thank you for helping to make our work possible. The following organizations and individuals are the people who we know supported OPAL Community Land Trust in 2025. If we have inadvertently omitted you, please let us know.

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San Juan County, Orcas Island Community Foundation (OICF), WaFd Foundation, National Philanthropic Trust, Banner Bank, Emmanuel Episcopal Parish of Orcas Island, Gibson's North Beach Inn, Horizon Title Company, HUD-SHOP, Island Excavating, Island Market, Key Bank Foundation, San Juan Islands Conservation District, Theda & Tamblin Clark Smith Family Foundation, WA State Department of Commerce, WA State Housing Trust Fund, WA State Housing Finance Commission.

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OPAL's Paradox

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set the stage for OPAL to work with contractors in 2026 to install utilities and a new road and to start building 20 year-round rental apartments with supportive services. By the end of 2025, with huge thanks to many islanders and funding championed by Representative Lekanoff and Senator Murray, the campaign to build the Pea Patch campus, in partnership with the Food Bank, had raised more than \$32M toward the estimated goal of \$40M for this community safety net and hub of social services anchored by a new OPAL neighborhood.

The stewardship work of taking good care of 108 acres of land and 104 rental homes and supporting 110 homeowners continued. OPAL's staff maintained rental properties, facilitated five resales to new homebuyers, helped 19 homeowners with repairs or capital replacements, assisted three homeowners avoid default on their mortgages and provided housing counseling to 22 households.

Now, for the part about a paradox.

People who have worked for OPAL have tended to stay for a long time. Senior staff members currently have tenures of 20, 24 and 30 years. That's been a strength, and now we're striving to have that not become a vulnerability. It is time to plan the slow and incremental handover to the next generation. Future staff will need different skills. Their jobs will be more specialized. And OPAL will need new operating systems.

To guide this work, OPAL hired a coach. She is working with staff members and the board of trustees. Starting with culture and values and moving on to detailed steps and benchmarks, the process will assure OPAL is ready for staff members to retire in two, three and four years from now. To keep the best of OPAL's culture means passing on the stories from one generation to the next, and the best way to do that is to have overlap between seasoned and new staff members.



Representative Debra Lekanoff, San Juan County Council Chair Justin Paulsen, OPAL Executive Director Lisa Byers and volunteers turn the ground at the Pea Patch Community Campus to mark the start of site work in January 2026.

Two important first steps for new staffing occurred in 2025. OPAL hired longtime islander Tom Tillman for the newly created position of Facilities Manager. His primary focus is maintaining the buildings and grounds for all of OPAL's 104 rental homes. He also helps occasionally with issues that arise in neighborhoods. Thanks to Tom we solved a years-long mystery involving a slow underground water leak in one neighborhood. *Hooray for Tom!*

OPAL also hired Lily Goldberg as the Associate Homeownership Director. With a solid background in the community land trust model from her time working at the San Juan Island Home Trust, she is learning from Julie Brunner about guiding and facilitating people's journeys from applying to purchasing a home to providing support for homeowners who need a helping hand now and then. In her first two months on the job, OPAL closed on the sale of six homes to new homebuyers. *Hooray for Lily!*

Holding paradox can generate creativity. Over the coming years we will continue to listen to one another, to adapt to changing circumstances, and to keep the needs of the Orcas community as our guide.

**2025 Abbreviated Consolidated
Audited Statement of Activities**
with comparison to 2024

Revenues:	2025	2024
Lease Fees & Rents	\$1,387,401	\$1,237,448
House Sales & Fees	\$23,207	\$6,085
Contributions	\$6,025,612	\$1,669,195
Grants	\$3,792,426	\$1,482,134
Interest, Gains & Other	\$648,947	\$329,739
Total Revenues:	\$11,877,593	\$4,724,601
Expenses:		
Housing Development	\$186,190	\$138,634
Loan Programs	\$70,732	\$67,605
Leasehold Stewardship	\$212,707	\$140,851
Rental Stewardship	\$1,941,070	\$1,802,439
Administration	\$432,746	\$419,900
Fundraising	\$65,941	\$71,430
Total Expenses:	\$2,909,386	\$2,640,859
Unrestricted Net Assets:	\$8,968,207	\$2,083,742

**2025 Abbreviated Consolidated
Audited Statement of Financial Position**
with comparison to 2024

Assets:	2025	2024
Cash	\$2,391,816	\$2,198,938
Investments	\$3,876,162	\$2,278,899
Other Current Assets	\$2,991,833	\$692,243
Notes Receivable, Net	\$1,827,273	\$2,088,555
Property, Net	\$42,956,292	\$37,451,837
Total Assets:	\$54,043,376	\$44,710,472
Liabilities:		
Current Liabilities	\$1,380,467	\$605,536
Property Reserves	\$466,793	\$427,498
Long-Term Liabilities	\$7,878,193	\$8,327,722
Total Liabilities:	\$9,725,453	\$9,360,756
Net Assets:		
Unrestricted	\$40,352,900	\$33,380,731
Board Designated	\$1,589,518	\$1,543,480
Donor Restricted	\$2,375,505	\$425,505
Total Net Assets:	\$44,317,923	\$35,349,716
Total Liabilities & Net Assets:	\$54,043,376	\$44,710,472

A copy of the audit prepared by Comer-Nowling is available upon request.



Kidder Way is a thoughtfully designed homeownership neighborhood of five duplexes—ten family homes rooted in community. This photo captures the open house as the project neared completion, marking a major milestone. Today, these condominium-style homes are complete and welcoming families home.