



WESTCHESTER
ECONOMIC
RECOVERY
TASK FORCE

**Ideas and Recommendations for
Utilizing Federal Recovery Funds**

LAST UPDATED: SEPTEMBER 2021

INTRODUCTION



On August 19, the Business Council of Westchester held a virtual State of the Economy Town Hall meeting to elicit ideas from our members on how the County should utilize the \$188 million in federal funding it will receive over the next two years from the American Rescue Plan.

The forum, which was co-sponsored by the County, featured Westchester County's Director of Economic Development Bridget Gibbons and Westchester County Planning Commissioner Norma Drummond.

More than 80 people attended the virtual forum with many more watching on Facebook. They provided a wide range of exciting and innovative ideas. This latest report from the BCW's Westchester Economic Recovery Task presents the results of the Town Hall forum.

Overall, we were very impressed with the variety of creative and exciting recommendations and ideas we received from our members. This report will be presented to Westchester County Executive George Latimer for a public hearing to be held September 14.

This report is yet another example of the solid partnership that we have with the County Executive and his team. I would like to thank the BCW members who contributed to this important report.

The BCW Westchester Economic Recovery Task, which includes over 60 business leaders from different sectors in the County, was created during the early months of the pandemic to enlist their help in coming up with sustainable action items to assist the County to begin to rebound from the pandemic. The Task Force has held numerous Town Hall meetings and issued two reports that were sent to the Governor and County Executive.

Due to the ongoing challenges that the County will continue to face, the Task Force will continue to be a proactive partner to assist the County to help bring economic development and business back to Westchester.

Thank you!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marsha Gordon".

MARSHA GORDON
President and CEO
The Business Council of Westchester

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LIFE SCIENCES & ADVANCED MANUFACTURING

- + Matching recruitment funding grants for STEM-based businesses. County to provide matching grants to fledgling firms to assist in the recruitment and hiring of new employees (higher amounts for recruitment efforts of people of color) which may come in the form of digital ads, participating in recruitment fairs, offsetting travel costs, attending on-campus recruit fairs, etc.
- + Westchester County to upgrade and consolidate all of their laboratory facilities (health, environmental, crime) into one brand new facility with 20,000 of additional laboratory and office space for small life sciences companies.
- + Westchester County to use its own real estate resources to convert County-owned properties into maker/light industrial subsidized spaces for private industry in the advanced manufacturing sector.
- + County set aside \$1 million in tax vouchers to offset the local homeowner tax bills for entrepreneurs who invest in a new business venture in the County.
- + County, working with local colleges and universities, pay for dorm housing and transportation (to and from work) for 100 summer interns working within STEM-based small-to-mid-sized businesses. Companies must agree to provide a salary for the summer intern. \$500,000 should cover 100 interns.
- + Repurposing hotels which have recently closed to be used as housing for 100 summer interns who would be hired by STEM-based small to midsize companies.

JOB TRAINING

- + Support a BCW initiative that would create a public/private partnership to help train apprentices who would get on-the-job training with local construction firms. The initiative would create local jobs and fill a need for construction industry workers.
- + Fund the development of a two-year certification program at Westchester Community College specific to industrial robotics repair, including curriculum development, funding for equipping and constructing (or redeveloping) an on-campus facility to house the new initiative. Partner with ConEd and/or NYPA on the new facility.
- + Launch a Countywide internship and job shadowing program working closely with the entertainment industry that has set up production throughout Westchester. The County will provide stipend payments to the students to learn about job opportunities within the industry by hands-on experience with local projects throughout the year.



BROADBAND

- + Help close the digital divide by expanding broadband capabilities to areas lacking proper coverage, provide free WiFi for students and others needing Internet access.
- + Provide free WiFi throughout all of Westchester County.
- + Provide a \$1 million economic development grant to all 48 municipalities in Westchester County to be used specifically on expanding digital infrastructure for business attraction or retention.

CLEAN ENERGY

- + County to invest in 1,000 electric car charging stations within 1,000 days (should be co-sponsored by NYPA or Con Ed) to rapidly increase the adoption of electric-based transportation in the County.
- + Special priorities placed around transportation hubs (train stations), commercial parking lots, Main Street shopping districts, healthcare campuses and major employers. County will cover 75% of cost with matching funds to come from private enterprise, other government entities, utility companies, etc.
- + Convert all County vehicles to electric vehicles by 2025.
- + With the closing of Indian Point and the need to focus on renewable energy, the County should create a clean energy task force to provide solutions such as building solar storage facilities, converting the County's fleet to electric vehicles, and installing more electric car charging stations in public places.
- + To get more people back into Westchester County office buildings, the Office of Economic Development should work with NYSERDA to establish a low-interest loan fund to help offset the costs of upgrading and improving the efficiency of building HVAC systems.
- + Similar to when Westchester County formed COWPUSA as a means of granting reduced electricity rates to newly attracted and expanding businesses in the County, Westchester should form its own green energy investment fund to help businesses offset the costs of installing energy efficient and environmentally sustainable technologies.



CHILD CARE

- + Add funding for childcare and capital projects for childcare facilities. The need for quality childcare became apparent during the pandemic when businesses struggled to support employees coping with childcare needs.
- + Develop a racial equity scorecard to ensure that funding is equally distributed to areas of needs.
- + Expand the capacity of the Virginia Marx’s Children’s Center on Westchester Community College’s campus to accommodate greater childcare needs for unemployed residents seeking further education and certification in order to become qualified for new full-time jobs.
- + Convert currently empty hotels into fully staffed daycare centers near areas of greatest need such as healthcare campuses, colleges and universities, large government agencies and major employers. Working with community partners, Westchester County should pay for the staffing, equipment, insurance, and other related costs, while charging a small fee to help offset the expenses of running the facilities.
- + Provide grants to co-working spaces to expand their capabilities to include childcare services.
- + Westchester County should work with the Child Care Council of Westchester to create an investment fund that will provide small grants – \$5,000 to \$10,000 – for equipment and supply purchases to help in-home and smaller daycare providers expand their capabilities for learning and recreational activities. The CCC should be allowed to tap into the County’s larger purchasing power to reduce the costs for equipment purchases.
- + Start a Westchester County grant fund called Born to Shop that would help start-up childcare businesses move out of homes and into converted (formerly empty) retail spaces within local areas in the greatest need of expanded health care services.
- + Increase new Title XX slots for working parents from 200% Federal Poverty Level (FPL) to 255% FPL. Increase Westchester Child Care Scholarship Program awards for working parents from 255% FPL to 85% State Median Income (SMI).

HEALTH CARE

- + Focus on workforce development: continuing education (tuition assistance) to increase the healthcare pool and resources in Westchester.
- + For Burke Rehabilitation specifically: more single bedded rooms to prepare, prevent and respond to the ongoing pandemic and any future pandemics; an outdoor mobility terrain park comprised of various surfaces patients can learn to manipulate safely and in a socially distanced manner prior to discharge so that they are prepared to employ what they learned in rehab.
- + More money focused on education and training of the future healthcare workforce ie: nurses, medical assistants, technology-oriented ancillary staff. We need to pay better wages so they can afford to live in our community.
- + Enhance community resilience against all hazards — natural and man-made — by investing in interprofessional, multi-agency strategic planning and training operations conducted by the Center for Disaster Medicine at New York Medical College in partnership with Westchester Departments of Emergency Services, Public Safety, Health, and Mental Health).
- + Secure and integrate public health infrastructure by investing in a highly trained cadre of professional personnel in the Department of Health for both basic and comprehensive public support functions (e.g., engineers, sanitarians, epidemiologists, triage-reception specialists).
- + Leverage the success of the Westchester Healthy Neighborhoods Program (currently limited to parts of Yonkers) by investing in environmental equity through county-wide improvements in residential structures and safe interior living spaces for all, working in concert with environmental medical specialists in the Children’s Environmental Health Center of the Hudson Valley at Boston Children’s Health Physicians and Maria Fareri Children’s Hospital at Westchester Medical Center.

EDUCATION

- + Support the higher education community in the County with gap funding in technology, local transportation costs and specific curriculum development.
- + County to provide scholarships to local municipalities to send government officials, employees, board members, etc. to economic development certification courses and conferences on a variety of topics such as business attraction and retention, main street revitalization, rezoning, etc.
- + Set a goal for every Westchester County public school student to take a course in entrepreneurship— either in-person or online instruction.
- + Fund a program to be called **STEM Stars**, which will be a new core of paid volunteers providing free tutoring services in math and science to help those public-school students performing below grade level. STEM Stars will primarily concentrate on assisting students at the elementary school level to provide a stronger base of skills that will hopefully carry forward with the students as they progress to middle- and high school-level courses.
- + Fund and launch a new initiative called **Me and My Shadow** that will combine paid job-shadowing opportunities with childcare services for individuals graduating from job certification or two-year degree programs that will help students immerse themselves in their field of study while gaining real work experience.
- + Create and fund **STEM Cells**, which would bring enhanced STEM learning into Westchester County’s prison system for those inmates currently studying for their GED. This program will expose participants to concepts in science, technology, engineering, and math delivered via video- or Internet-based platforms with special presentations from experienced STEM leaders in their respective fields.
- + Workforce Career Centers housed in each of Westchester Community College’s extension sites and at EOC (Yonkers) to link talent pipeline (and those from nearby colleges) with current and future employers.
- + Financial support for new WCC Branch Campus at Yonkers - \$1 million for capital expenses
- + Coordination with County social services for enhanced support of college students and employees on the following issues: food, housing insecurity; childcare needs; mental health support, expansion of Employee Assistance Program services and address digital divide by expanding broadband access.

SENIORS

- + Waive County Park fees for seniors and veterans. Seniors and veterans have already paid their dues and the \$5 per visit they may pay for entrance fees is vastly outweighed by having healthier seniors and veterans. Even walking in a County park can be beneficial to seniors.
- + Provide assistance to seniors faced with rising cost of long-term care. According to a recent study, households with a member aged 85 or above spent an average of \$24,185 out-of-pocket for long-term care.
- + Westchester County Department of Senior Programs and Services to create its own “**Nerd Herd**” for providing technical assistance and training to County seniors.
- + County to provide funding for establishing a 24-7 help desk, technology for running training sessions at senior centers, and salaries for a management team with the use of volunteers from local colleges, universities and high schools.
- + Invest in programs for seniors to become more socially engaged to live a healthier lifestyle. Social engagement offers a variety of benefits, including better cognitive function, better overall health, better immune health and increased longevity.

NON-PROFITS

+ Support local not-for-profits in job creation and retention. Westchester County's nonprofit sector plays a critical economic role as both a job creator and revenue generator. The sector is not only the largest employer among all industries in Westchester County, employing nearly 54,000 people, but has contributed significantly to the County's private employment growth over the past decade despite the recent recession. In addition, the Westchester nonprofit sector has a considerable financial footprint in the County.

- + Nonprofits are a prime contributor to the quality of life in Westchester—arts, education, health care, the environment, housing and services for children and adults.
- + Nonprofits also are critical to business success, since they provide supportive services to employees and their family members that enable employees to be productive while at work. They also provide a wide range of recreational opportunities that encourage people to want to live in Westchester.

YOUTH

Promote At-Risk-Youth programs help keep young people from becoming troubled adults. Benefits of At-Risk-Youth work experience programs include:

- + Learning new trades provides employment options for their futures.
- + Expanding a person's skill set makes them more marketable in the job market.
- + Increased self-confidence improves chances of gaining employment. How a person presents themselves in an interview often times is the pivotal hiring factor.

- + Youth become more aware of career paths they may not have known about, which increases their options.
- + Students can try different departments and determine if they would like that as a career or not.
- + Able to include all Work Experience Program jobs on their resumes which gives them a leg up on other candidates who did not work in high school.
- + Students learn other skills that boost their employability once they venture out on their own.



HOUSING

- + Launch a new program called **Tiny Town** that would provide training the next generation of home builders with a fully funded, tiny home construction facility located on the campus of Westchester Community College. Tiny Town will include the tools, materials, instructors, and equipment necessary for educating participants on how to design, build and sell tiny homes. Several homes will be installed on the campus to provide living spaces for the participants while learning their trade. Eventually, the sale of the homes will provide enough revenue to make the program self-sustaining.
- + Create **Power to the People**, a grant fund that will pay for 75% of the cost for installing electric car recharging stations at large residential properties throughout Westchester County.
- + Launch a \$10 million revolving loan fund to support the development of multifamily rental units for individuals and families earning up to 60 percent of the area's median income. The idea is based upon a similar successful loan fund started in Denver, to address a similar lack of affordable housing.
- + Start a low-to-no interest loan \$5 million fund called **Welcome Home** that would assist returning military veterans to purchase a home in Westchester County.

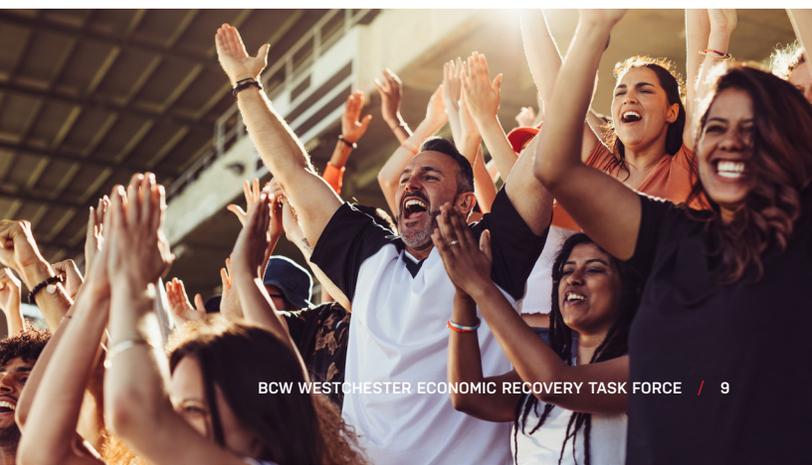
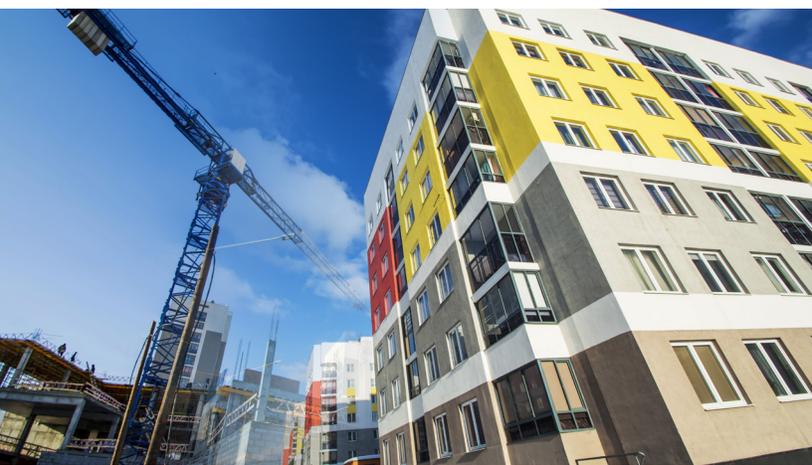
The fund would be managed by the Westchester County Veterans Services Agency and a small group of volunteer local bank professionals. The fund will provide the loans as well as additional services to assist the veterans in making a successful transition to home ownership.

- + Westchester County's IDA to offer every affordable housing developer a subscription to NYC-based ESUSU, which provides a digital platform for capturing and reporting rental data to credit bureaus so residents can build credit while helping the developers increase their cash flow and reduce their costs. The subscription will provide access to the platform for both the developer, as well as to each renter for as long as they are renting within a participating property.
- + The bulk of the housing money for the American Rescue Funding is earmarked for rental assistance and mortgage assistance. It's vital that the money flows more smoothly. However, if there was a program that would incentivize landlords, especially small landlords, to make property improvements, that could be very impactful. A good amount of money is earmarked to infrastructure improvements. This would be infrastructure improvements for rental buildings which have been slammed by the fallout from the pandemic.

TOURISM & TRAVEL

- + Convert the Westchester County Center into a state-of-the-art sports and convention center that would attract tourism and business to boost the County's economy.
- + Fund marketing campaigns to boost tourism and help the struggling hospitality sector which was hit hard by the pandemic.

- + Market Westchester County to a more national audience. Don't rely on NY State Tourism to sell Westchester.
- + Open a pop-up tourist information kiosk for Westchester County at the New York State Thruway rest stop in Ardsley. Funding will be provided to build and run the information kiosk, which will have brochures and maps for finding key recreational and entertainment resources in the County.



TRANSPORTATION

- + Fund Westchester County’s Mobility and Transit Plan with investments in expanding the network of electric vans to assist residents with accessing healthcare, educational, recreational, government and vocational resources.
- + Support a major BCW initiative to enhance, not expand, Westchester County Airport to serve the traveling public, business, and the general community. Steps need to be taken to assure the successful future of this essential transportation, workforce and economic development hub for our County.
- + Create **Shared Space**, a new digital platform developed and maintained by Westchester County for the purpose of matching area residents with work commuting ridesharing opportunities. Active participants in the program will receive a monthly gas card to offset the costs for fuel, or if using an electric car, will receive a debit card to offset charging costs. Drivers must be fully insured, have a clean driving record, and show proof of vehicle inspection to participate.
- + Create a new service of Westchester County’s Department of Senior Programs and Services called **Extra Mile** that would provide free transportation to and from places of employment for County seniors who want to continue working but cannot afford to pay for (and maintain) their own transportation and reside in a “public transportation desert.”
- + The County to provide free Wi-Fi on all County buses and public bus stops as a way of encouraging more people to take mass transit vs. driving in their own vehicle.
- + Through ArtsWestchester, the County to provide grants to local artists to reimagine bus stops within their communities as a hybrid combination of artistic installation and functional transportation hub to be known as **Bee Hives**. The program will begin as a contest and the best ideas will be awarded the funding to turn the artists’ creations into reality.

TECHNOLOGY

- + Create a **Digital Initiative Grants Increase Technology Solutions (DIGITS) Fund**, which will assist non-profit services providers to Westchester County in upgrading their technology platforms to improve services and reduce costs, such as developing smartphone apps and accepting digital payments, creating electronic inventory systems, or deploying customer service platforms.
- + Mobilize municipalities by co-investing with local municipalities in mobilizing government services by developing common smartphone application platforms for registering applications, accepting electronic payments, etc.
- + Invest in developing a Countywide plan for mapping out potential locations in Westchester County for drone pads and aerial pathways that will facilitate increasing the use of drones for delivering products, cultivating educational and training opportunities, using the County as a drone port for delivery into NYC.
- + In partnership with local colleges and universities, Westchester County should develop and staff a state-of-the-art cybersecurity facility which can be utilized by County law enforcement and other government agencies for monitoring—and during—a cyberattack.



ENTREPRENEURSHIP

- + Westchester County to fund the creation of a healthcare incubator for medical professionals interested in launching their own entrepreneurial venture. The incubator should be located within an existing hospital or on a healthcare campus.
- + The Westchester County IDA should establish and fund a “small-scale” real estate development initiative which provides training, coaching and mentoring to individuals (with preference given to underserved communities) looking to build small incremental projects in existing neighborhoods.
- + Provide low-interest loans or direct grants to entrepreneurs who establish small-scale manufacturing businesses within empty retail store locations spread throughout Westchester County.
- + Westchester County IDA to create a **Legal Fund** which will provide grants to start-up businesses for paying legal fees for establishing a business, reviewing contracts, etc.

URBAN PLANNING

- + Invest in developing a Countywide initiative to assist municipalities in analyzing how to redesign urban neighborhoods as micro-cities, where residents’ needs (living, working, shopping, entertainment) exist within a 15-minute trip by foot or bike.
- + Provide low-interest loans to companies interested in developing urban/indoor farms within Westchester County’s largest cities utilizing properties that are currently abandoned or currently designed for another use such as an office building.
- + Westchester County should establish a **Future Fund**, which provides grants to municipalities interested in implementing urban planning concepts that reduce traffic, expand the use of green energy technologies, provide new technology platforms, etc.
- + Establish a Countywide, main street community improvement fund, which provides grants of \$10,000 or less for smaller projects that assist in beautifying small shopping districts within Westchester communities and neighborhoods. Grants may be used for painting, installing benches, plantings, etc.



PARKS & RECREATION

- + Partner with Westchester Parks Foundation to establish an environmentally sustainable microbrewery and beverage craft educational center at the former Cantina site at V.E. Macy Park in Greenburgh off the Saw Mill River Parkway.
- + Expand Westchester County’s capabilities within the parks system by establishing and maintaining several bike rental facilities at key trail locations, adding new disability friendly playgrounds, building smaller performance venues for outdoor performances, etc.
- + Convert half of Bike Sundays to Walk Sundays with art installations along the Bronx River Parkway for people to enjoy as they stroll the length of the path. Other County

sponsored amenities could be portable restrooms, local food and beverage options, pop-up play areas or interactive displays.

- + Fund a **Westchester on the Water** public-private initiative as a permanent expansion of the Parks Department offerings within those parks—such as Glen Island or Playland—that offer easy access to a large body of water. Added amenities would include designated areas for leg-powered duck boats, row boats, kayaks and other fun, water-based vehicles. Several new docks and special zones could be established to accommodate the development of waterfront dining or other forms of entertainment along the water.

RETAIL & HOSPITALITY

- + Fund a Countywide pop-up shop initiative to convert empty retail store fronts into temporary stores for local companies to sell their goods during the upcoming holiday season and/or during other times throughout the year. The County will select ten locations to pay rent and rehabilitate the spaces to encourage uses for more than one vendor at each location.
- + Establish the first **Countywide Block Party Day**, which provides the resources for each Westchester community to hold its own block party to encourage the promotion

of local artisans, food and beverage establishments and offer an opportunity for all Westchester residents to come together on at least one designated day a year.

- + Create a lifestyle channel on YouTube/cable access that features sites/restaurants/events. PM Magazine format where local historical sites, parks, recreational sites, restaurants and bars are featured. Channel could also show movies filmed in Westchester or featuring Westchester.

ARTS

- + Add a new category to ArtsWestchester’s Challenge Grant Program for municipalities in Westchester. The launch of a new Municipal Arts Challenge program would encourage partnerships between cities, towns and villages and their cultural assets to activate under-realized spaces with public art, including murals, sculptures, pop-up performances and festivals. This County matching grant initiative would be both a redevelopment and workforce program that could revive Main Streets, re-envision shared spaces, and create jobs for creative workers still underemployed due to COVID-19.
- + Invest in the cultural expressions of Westchester’s diverse populations through collaboration with

ArtsWestchester’s “Westchester Roots Folk Arts Program.” Funding would support Juneteenth celebrations and other cultural events organized by and reflective of Westchester’s BIPOC communities.

- + Have the County partner with ArtsWestchester on a Cultural Plan for Westchester County. It has been three decades since the last cultural plan. In addition, a global pandemic has reshaped the economic, social, and cultural landscapes of Westchester County. In light of key environmental factors, it is time to take a look at how the creative sector can grow and prosper and support the smart and sustainable growth of Westchester County.