



## **Business Council of Westchester's Economic Recovery Task Force holds town hall meeting**

May 15, 2020 - Front Section



Rye Brook, NY Over 150 business leaders from across Westchester attended a Business Council of Westchester (BCW) virtual town hall meeting to share their concerns and needs as the state and Westchester move to restart the economy after the coronavirus pandemic.

Business leaders from across Westchester had questions and suggestions as they raised concerns ranging from health, safety and liability to a need for more clarity on which business sectors are included in the state's phased openings and why.

The virtual town hall meeting was held by the BCW's Westchester Economic Recovery Task Force as it works to prepare a strategic plan with specific recovery measures and recommendations to assist Westchester's diverse business and not-for-profit sectors. The task force is made up of more

than 40 high level leaders from real estate development companies who are part of the BCW's Coalition for Smart Development, as well as representatives from key economic sectors including retail, hospitality, healthcare, biotech, technology, higher education, professional services, finance, insurance, transportation, the arts and government.

"We were very encouraged by the large numbers of business leaders who participated today, and by the thoughtful and substantive suggestions that were made," said Marsha Gordon, president and CEO of BCW. "Over the coming weeks and months as Westchester reemerges from the shutdown, we will face daunting challenges. Through a series of sector specific sub-committees, the BCW Task Force will explore specific challenges and promulgate recommendations and programs to the Governor and County Executive that meaningfully address needs in practical and achievable ways."

At the state level, governor Andrew Cuomo has formed the New York Forward Re-Opening Advisory Board which includes members of the BCW as the state pursues a phased plan to re-open New York on a regional basis and by industry. County executive George Latimer is leading the county government's response, and Westchester director of economic development Bridget Gibbons is a member of the BCW Task Force.

During the 60-minute meeting business and not-for-profit leaders shared the challenges they face in restarting their businesses and not-for-profits and offered a broad array of comments and specific suggestions about actions that government could take to assist them.

Sean Meade, general manager of Cambria Suites Hotels in White Plains and President of the Westchester Hotel Association, said that the state will need to help build confidence in the tourism industry by spending money on marketing and offering other resources to hospitality businesses. "We need to instill consumer confidence and get people to start traveling," he said.

Michael Murphy of Murphy Bros. Contracting said that private construction should be allowed to restart at the May 15 initial reopening date since essential construction projects have had "amazing success" at doing business safely, while Ben Palancia of Palancia Insurance in Mamaroneck, suggested the state consider liability protections for businesses such as restaurants so they are not sued if people become ill.

Joseph Pizzimenti of CClean industrial cleaning and Bud Hammer of Atlantic Westchester, a heating, ventilation and air conditioning business, said they were both concerned about worker protections including better guidance on keeping employees safe and better access to personal protective equipment. "Safety and security going into buildings will be very important," said Hammer.

John Ravitz, vice president and COO of the BCW, said the task force's next step would be to assemble all the recommendations by sector and present to Cuomo and Latimer.

"This will be the first of many recommendations that we hope will assist state and local governments during the reemergence stages," said Ravitz.

Gordon said, "We are confident that the impressive group of leaders we have brought together can and will provide the wisdom, insight and creative thinking to enable the creation of constructive and practical plans for moving forward."

BCW Westchester Economic Recovery Task Force Members:

Joseph Apicella, Macquesten Development – Real Estate\*

Luiz Aragon, City of New Rochelle – Government

Bill Balter, Wilder Balter Partners – Real Estate\*

Greg Berger, Robert Martin Company - Real Estate\*

Liz Bracken-Thompson, Thompson & Bender – Marketing/ Communications

Peter Chavkin, Lighthouse Landing Communities – Real Estate\*

Robert Cioffi, Progressive Computing - Technology

Tom DeCaro, Benchmark Title Agency - Professional Services/Title Insurance\*

John DeCicco, DeCicco & Sons - Retail

Neil DeLuca, The DeLuca Group – Real Estate\*

Heidi Davidson, Galvanize Worldwide - BCW Board Chairman/Marketing/Communications

Taryn Duffy, Empire City by MGM Resorts – Gaming/Entertainment

John Fareri, Fareri Associates – Real Estate\*

Tim Foley, Builders Institute of Westchester – Construction/Real Estate\*

Michael Fosina, NewYork-Presbyterian Lawrence Hospital - Healthcare

Susan Fox, Westchester Institute for Human Development – Not-for-Profit

Ken Furst, Levitt-Furst Associates – Professional Services/Insurance

David Garten, RXR - Real Estate\*

Bridget Gibbons, Westchester County - Government

Martin Ginsburg, Ginsburg Development - Real Estate \*

Larry Gottlieb, Robert Martin Company - Real Estate\*

Richard Haggerty, Hudson Gateway Association of Realtors - Real Estate

Jeffrey Haydon, Caramoor Center for Music and the Arts - Arts

Peter Herrero, NY Hospitality Group - Hospitality

April Horton, Verizon – Technology

Anthony Justic, Maier Markey & Justic - Professional Services/Accounting

Marvin Krislov, Pace University - Higher Education

Joseph McCoy, People's United Bank - Finance

Sean Meade, Cambria Hotels/Westchester Hotel Association - Hospitality

Jeff Nelson, RXR – Real Estate\*

Kevin Plunkett, Simone Development Companies – Real Estate\*

Liz Pollack, Cross County Shopping Center - Retail

George Poth, Regeneron Pharmaceuticals - Biotech

Joseph Saccomano Jr., Jackson Lewis - Professional Services/Law

Michael Shiffer, MTA Metro-North Railroad - Transportation

Joseph Simone, Simone Development Companies– Real Estate\*

Howard Stein, Small Business Development Center- Small Business

Edward Stoppelmann, Red Oak Transportation -Transportation  
Joseph Stout, Westchester Parks Foundation – Recreation  
Jim Surdoval, Ginsburg Development - Real Estate\*  
Geoff Thompson, Thompson & Bender - Marketing/Communications  
Mark Weingarten, DeBello Donnellan & Weingarten – Professional Services/Law\*  
Budd Wiesenberg, CBRE - Real Estate  
Roger Woolsey, Million Air – Transportation

\*Member BCW Coalition for Smart Development in Westchester

The county's largest and most influential business membership organization, The Business Council of Westchester is committed to helping businesses market, learn, advocate and grow. In addition, The Business Council of Westchester is actively involved in reviewing federal, state and county legislation and regulations in order to assess the potential impact on the business community and to influence the outcomes through advocacy when the business community's interests may be affected. It also acts as an information resource for the business community and government leaders at all levels. Visit [www.thebcw.org](http://www.thebcw.org)

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