

SUGAR HILL ECONOMIC RECOVERY TASK FORCE

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

August 10, 2020



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Task Force Creation

The Coronavirus pandemic has had a devastating effect on public health as well as economic health, globally, nationally, regionally, and locally in Sugar Hill due to changing consumer patterns, limited safely-permitted interactions with businesses, and business closures required to protect health and public safety.

The Sugar Hill Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) was created at the request of Mayor Steve Edwards and City Manager Paul Radford in response to the health and economic impact of the Coronavirus pandemic.

With the issuance of Executive Order #2020-03 on April 24th, 2020, the Sugar Hill Economic Recovery Taskforce was formed with a focus on convening community representatives to provide insight and problem solving related to:

- effective local economic recovery efforts
- business support,
- community health,
- community development and outreach



Members

Members of The Sugar Hill Economic Recovery Task Force represent a range of community partners and perspectives, ensuring that the approach to economic recovery is based on collaboration grounded in diverse experiences.

Selection of members and the work of the ERTF is facilitated and moderated by representatives of The City of Sugar Hill (Economic Development Director and Downtown Coordinator) and two representatives of Sugar Hill City Council (Brandon Hembree and Taylor Anderson) with input from and appointment by the Mayor and City Manager.

Mauricio Menesses, Sugar Hill Church, and Stacy DeRogatis, Keller Williams Realty, were selected to serve as Chair and Co-Chair (respectively) of the group.

As stated in the Executive Order establishing the group, the task force may include representative(s) of the following industries and interests:

- Child Care
- Construction
- Education
- Entrepreneurship
- Finance
- Grocery
- Healthcare
- Hospitality/Special Events
- Law
- Manufacturing
- Non-Profit
- Real Estate
- Restaurants/Food Service
- Retail
- Tourism
- Utility Provider



The group may also include representative(s) of the following entities and organizations:

- Gwinnett County Office of Economic Development
- The Gwinnett Municipal Association
- The Sugar Hill Business Alliance
- The Suite Spot
- Partnership Gwinnett
- The University of Georgia Small Business Development Center

Regular participants in the task force and contributors to this report include:

Construction

Reeves + Young

Jeff Buser

Education

GCPS/ Lanier HS CDAT

Mike Reilly

Education - Student

Sugar Hill Youth Council

Bailey Coleman

Entrepreneurship

**SH Church,
Latino Business Outreach**

Mauricio Menesses

Finance

Quantum National Bank

Tyler Phillips

Government

City of Sugar Hill City Council

Taylor Anderson

Government

City of Sugar Hill City Council

Brandon Hembree

Government - Econ. Dev.

City of Sugar Hill

Mercy Montgomery

Government - Downtown Dev.

City of Sugar Hill

Nadia Merritt

Healthcare

Kaiser

Trey Ragsdale

Legal

The White Firm

Jeremy White

Manufacturing

MTI Bath

Jamie Westbrook

Non-Profit

North Gwinnett Co-Op

Kim Phillips

Real Estate

Keller Williams

Stacy DeRogatis, Task Force Co-Chair

Retail

Perazim Clothing + Lifestyle Boutique

Lora Amedu

Tourism

Explore Gwinnett

Lisa Anders

Utility Provider

Georgia Power

Brooke Perez

Gwinnett County

GC Economic Development

Mark Farmer

Gwinnett Municipal Association

Randy Meacham

Partnership Gwinnett

Andrew Carnes

Sugar Hill Business Alliance

Tom Sheldon

Suite Spot

Jajeh Financial

Patrick Currie

The University of Georgia

Small Business Development Center

Howard Dent, III

Subcommittees

Work of the task force in April and May, 2020 established the need for working subcommittees focused on the following topics:

Safe Operations: Consider best practices, necessary ongoing adaptations, and creative approaches to changed operations. Recommend strategies focused on ensuring the safety of employees, clients, and the public based on analysis of updated public health data and research driven decision making.

Financial Resources: Research and consideration of financial resources and support for small businesses (and individuals as appropriate) including federal Small Business Administration programs, resources provided by The University of Georgia Small Business Development Center, and other opportunities.

Community Health & Wellness: Consideration of immediate concerns such as personal protective equipment (PPE) sourcing as well as on-going community initiatives for healthy living and disease prevention. The group will also work to identify and understand unique needs of specific populations significantly (or potentially) impacted by the coronavirus such as older adults, homes that lack access to internet and transportation; and individuals with challenges accessing critical resources including food and utilities.

Community Research & Engagement: Identify opportunities for increased community engagement, idea sharing, and ways to move beyond this challenge more informed and stronger together. Potential data collection through community surveys and conversations as well as consideration of local and regional data collected by partners such as the Atlanta Regional Commission, planning institutions, and others. Support and expansion of relationships and programs connected with local and regional educational institutions, businesses, and the community.

Restaurants & Retail: Consideration of needs and supports specific to the retail and restaurant industries, as well as related policies, public interaction, and consumer behavior.



Meeting Structure

The first meeting of the Economic Recovery Task Force was convened on April 30th utilizing a virtual platform. The group met weekly until transitioning to bi-weekly meetings in late May to allow opportunity for subcommittee work.

The group continues to meet on a regular basis, generally bi-weekly on Thursday mornings, with adaptations in schedules to accommodate targeted milestones and work related to identified goals.

Meeting access information as well as agendas and minutes for the group can be found at www.cityofsugarhill.com

Themes

Several common themes emerged from early conversations and continued dialogue among the task force.

Information Sharing and Communication

Accessibility of information, both for businesses and the broader public, is critical. The ability to target communications to reach businesses and community members quickly with data and resources is an area of opportunity.

Support for Students

With an upending of in-person learning experiences including pivotal internship programs and other project-based learning, unique partnerships between business and education are important in supporting student learning experiences and workforce development.

Leveraging The Expertise of The Task Force to Meet Priorities

With members from a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds, the task force is ripe with opportunity to examine, critique, and construct big ideas as well as execute immediate actions to support businesses in Sugar Hill.

Priorities

In approaching actionable work, task force members identified priorities as:

- **Supporting newly established businesses** as well as partners that are key to the **downtown ecosystem**
- Safeguarding business viability and success while also **prioritizing safety** for staff, owners, and the community
- Informed **action based on data**, not preference for a return to “normal”
- Ongoing **communication** and community building
- **Responsiveness**, ensuring that all actions meet an identified need rather than creating a program or policy and then finding a need
- Don't ignore or discount the silly, strange, creative, and **out-of-the-box opportunities**

Dialogue also illustrated that the challenges and opportunities identified through this work are not necessarily new, but rather existing community elements refocused and understood differently through the lens of a public health and economic crisis.

Preliminary Recommendations

Searchable Database of Businesses

With industry-specific changes in permissible and safe operations as well as resources made available to certain types of business, an organized and complete searchable database of local businesses (including industry, contact point, phone, and email) is crucial to connecting businesses with critical resources. This database should be part of or linked with The City of Sugar Hill's business licensing process and easily accessible by staff communicating with businesses.

Webinar Series

Relevant to both students and businesses (and potentially the larger community), webinars focused on key topics will provide accessible information from experts, allow for timely updates and important dialogue, and can be quickly and easily implemented.

Potential webinar topics include:

- Virtual internship best practices
- Online networking
- Search Engine Optimization
- Student-presented webinars related to their unique knowledge
(EX: Lanier High School Center for Design and Technology students speaking on Google Sites development)
- Resources at Gwinnett Public Libraries
- Bank of webinars accessible via The University of Georgia's Small Business Development Center

Internships and Business Partnerships

Local schools, especially high schools with students seeking internships, can play an important role in mutually beneficial learning experiences that also meet needs of business.

With flexible educational support and open-minded business hosts, there is limitless opportunity for micro-internships focused on a specific project or problem-solving for businesses with a need to adapt to changing markets and operational environments.

The Lanier High School Center for Design and Technology (CDAT) also offers a range of services including signage, prototyping, and 3-D printing that can be beneficial for temporarily adapted operations of business as well as larger systemic change being considered and tested on a small scale. Sharing materials with businesses to summarize these partnership opportunities and considering problem-solving based micro-internships can provide meaningful experiences for students and flexible support for businesses adapting to ongoing changes.



Virtual Open Houses

Preliminary community and business-focused virtual open houses were held on July 22nd. Low “cost” in terms of staff and task force volunteer time, the conversations yielded thoughtful questions related to topics ranging from larger market trends to localized operations. With additional marketing and regular scheduling, increased participation is likely. These virtual open houses will serve as a unique opportunity for the public to connect directly with city staff and task force representatives through video chat and telephone to ask questions. The ongoing sessions will also allow the task force to better understand community and increase the culture of accessibility and support in Sugar Hill.

Community Building Experiences and Flexibility for Business

Flexibility and encouragement of unique business experiences, especially for business-to-consumer industries like restaurants and retail will be helped by operational flexibility.

Establishment of a busking ordinance to encourage informal, public street performances in the heart of Sugar Hill will contribute to the downtown environment, especially when larger concerts and other sizeable events aren't yet safe. Creatively, but safely, including artistic performance will encourage visitors, shoppers, and diners to “linger, longer.”

Additionally, flexibility in permitting to encourage creative “streatery” (street-based eatery) concepts that leverage outdoor space for expanded seating will enable restaurants to satisfy health practices related to social distancing and increase dining capacity.

There is also continued opportunity for relationship building through distribution of materials, such as the Guide to Sugar Hill and contact cards for city staff or task force members eager to support the unique needs of restaurant and retail businesses in the community.

Long Term Role of Economic Recovery Task Force

Given the long term and changeable nature of the economic and community impact of the Coronavirus pandemic it is anticipated that the work of the task force will continue for the foreseeable future. With the wealth of diverse perspectives represented, The Economic Recovery Task Force may also transition over time to serve as a long-term advisory committee to inform economic development strategy in Sugar Hill.

