

YoCo **STRONG** RECOVERY TASK FORCE



2021 UPDATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Submitted to the York County Commissioners JUNE 30, 2021

YoCo **STRONG** RECOVERY TASK FORCE

Thank you to the following task force members and staff:

Task Force Facilitator – Silas Chamberlin

Task Force Co-Chairs

Joe Adams	Tannisha Fuentes	Eric Menzer
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Task Force Supporting Staff

Kristy Bixler	Jason McSherry	Sully Pinos
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Task Force Input

Thank you to the dozens of additional committee members who provided input as part of the recovery task force process.

BACKGROUND

The York County Commissioners created the YoCo Strong Recovery Task Force in April 2020 to provide guidance on the county's response to the COVID 19 pandemic. In May 2020, the task force delivered an exhaustive report with 8 priority recommendations. The report informed the county's allocation of CARES Act funds and other responses to the pandemic.

In April 2021, the Commissioners reactivated the recovery task force and asked for updated recommendations to guide the county's recovery process and inform the allocation of \$87 million in American Rescue Plan Act funds. The task force created the following updated report during May and June 2021. Priority recommendations were shared with the county commissioners at their June 30 public meeting.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATIONS

The full task force report identifies dozens of important recommendations that should inform the county's current and future recovery. However, there were a number of recommendations that appeared across numerous focus areas and are clearly shared as priorities by the task force.

Those priority recommendations are:

Continue to provide emergency relief to businesses and non-profit organizations impacted by the pandemic and ongoing economic disruptions.

- While York County's economy is showing clear signs of recovery, several sectors—employing a significant portion of York County's workforce—continue to struggle. There continues to be a need for grant and loan programs that help support vulnerable businesses, including especially:
 - historically-disadvantaged owners and small businesses
 - hospitality, food, retail, arts, and tourism sectors
 - non-profits serving vulnerable populations and sectors, including the arts, tourism, and recreation sectors
 - start-up businesses ineligible for previous state and federal grant programs

Invest in continued enhancement of York County's emergency response capacity.

- The county serves as a coordinating entity during pandemics and other community emergencies. We should continue to invest in technological improvements to the Emergency Operations Center; ongoing improvements to the COVID hub site; and enhance sites that provided economic and community resources, such as Prepared York.
- Continue to prioritize and enhance outreach and communities to vulnerable populations through innovative, bilingual marketing and community partnerships with trusted institutions and leaders.

Reactivate York County's tourism economy.

- Few sectors of our economy were impacted more than tourism during the pandemic, and the effects of travel restrictions and shuttered attractions continue to be felt. County resources should focus on jumpstarting the tourism economy through grant programs that prioritize tourism assets, enhance marketing efforts, and make investments in capital projects with high tourism value. In particular, the outdoor economy of trails, parks, heritage sites, and open space proved to be resilient during the pandemic and will be a critical part of our tourism recovery and general economic recovery.

Implement the YoCo Fiber countywide broadband strategy to continue closing the digital divide.

- The importance of reliable, fast, and affordable internet access continues to be one of the major lessons of the pandemic and a crucial part of recovery efforts. Broadband has emerged as one of the key factors in a community's ability to be resilient during the pandemic and well-positioned for recovery. York County gained state and national attention for its proactive use of CARES funds to begin the process of expanding countywide broadband and can continue this crucial work using RESCUE Act funds, private investment, and federal grants. As broadband deployment is a complex and time-sensitive project, we recommend swift action to allocate funding.

Enhance the capacity of public and non-profit social service providers to deliver critical resources and support to county residents.

- The pandemic strained our social safety nets, placed a disproportionate burden on vulnerable populations, and will have lingering mental health, social, and occupational implications. This is the moment to invest in our capacity for Community Care Coordination through both systems change and technological investment to drive improved health and human service outcomes in York County. This is an opportunity for the County of York and its non-profit partners to collaborate closely.

Continue to prioritize programs that provide rent and mortgage relief.

- In York County, an estimated 8,000 renters and 13,000 homeowners are behind on payments. As moratoriums are lifted in the coming months, the nation faces potential eviction and foreclosure crises that will deeply impact households, strain social services, and threaten economic recovery. York County serves as a conduit for federal and state rent relief programs and should continue its work with non-profit partners to deploy those resources effectively. We recommend ongoing evaluation of opportunities to provide similar financial support and technical assistance to homeowners, who have been left out of federal relief programs to date.

Foster clear pathways to employment for new or displaced workers.

- The pandemic created historic disruptions to employment across the county. While York County has fared better than many parts of Pennsylvania, we continue to experience higher unemployment than in 2019, thousands of employees exiting the workforce, and significant obstacles for employers trying to hire at full capacity. The county has an opportunity to support ongoing rapid re-employment programs, re-entry programs, community college job skills trainings, apprenticeships, and partnerships with schools to help graduating seniors find meaningful, living wage employment.

Invest in programs that expand childcare capacity and the childcare workforce.

- Prior to the pandemic, York County had approximately 6,800 fewer available childcare “seats” than needed to meet demand. During the past year, this situation has grown even worse with the gap expanding by another 3,400 “seats” due to some centers closing permanently and others scaling back capacity to achieve social distancing guidelines. Further, the centers that remained open have struggled to attract and retain employees, exacerbating the obstacles to reopening to full capacity.
- With more than 2 million women exiting the labor force in the past 10 months and more than 60% of women reporting reduced working hours due to providing childcare at home, access to childcare has become not only a social and educational crisis but also a major obstacle to workforce development. The County should prioritize childcare centers in grant and loan programs and invest in programs that support the retention and growth of the childcare workforce.

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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, RESOURCES & PREPARDNESS

Chair: Bill James

RECOMMENDATION #1

Hand washing capability for homeless population to reduce the spread of illness/disease among this vulnerable population. Cost unknown. York Water was consulted on this in the past and was willing to cover the cost of the water.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Explore non-congregate temporary housing options for the homeless to quarantine. Cost unknown.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Explore Emergency Operations Center (EOC) improvements to increase technology to allow better collaboration with all partners. This would allow for a centralized command post and Joint Information Center. This would include a video wall, teleconferencing equipment.

Other updates or information to share related to York County's recovery:

Create a data hub with preparedness information, community lifelines and other incident information, using existing GIS resources as well as working with a trusted vendor.

Improve on a National Incident Management System (NIMS) training program for elected and appointed officials at the local and county level.

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EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE RECOVERY

Co-Chairs: Kim Brister, Dr. Larry Walthour, Kristy Bixler, Delma Rivera

RECOMMENDATION #1

Develop Local Supplier Diversity Commitment policies to increase the percentage of locally sourced purchasing from the County. Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

RECOMMENDATION #2

Invest in transportation infrastructure to expand bus access for front line/essential workers and populated employer campuses. Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

RECOMMENDATION #3

Invest in Community Based Organizations to provide services to the most affected portions and populations throughout the county. Leverage data to identify occupations at most risk and the labor force behind them. Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

RECOMMENDATION #4

Invest in Technology and Digital Literacy programming to bridge gaps of access for families and learners. Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

RECOMMENDATION #5

Develop/implement an outreach and communications plan that:

- strengthens community partnerships
- makes investments that address economic and healthcare disparities in disenfranchised and marginalized communities by providing resources through equitable means
- connects displaced workers with resources to assist with unemployment, child care, and other family support services
- makes critical messaging and economic investment opportunities accessible to York County's age diverse and vulnerable populations (i.e. mental health, elderly, addictions, homeless, etc.) through technology, literacy skills, and languages.

Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

RECOMMENDATION #6

Develop sustainable partnerships with local minority and faith-based organizations to help inform the equitable needs of services and resources for our marginalized communities. Commit a portion of recovery dollars to this effort

HEALTHCARE & RESURGENCE MITIGATION

Chair: Dr. Matthew Howie MD, FAAFP

RECOMMENDATION #1

Continue to refine county COVID-19 data hub web-site

RECOMMENDATION #2

Distribute PPE to health-related entities and businesses in need of supplies

RECOMMENDATION #3

Promote vaccine usage in community with attention to at-risk populations, including schools.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Ensure adequate access to non-congregant temporary housing

Other updates or information to share related to York County's recovery:

Explore work with local business community to plan for how to best respond to possible resurgence in the Fall.
Improve formal county public health capacity

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HOSPITALITY & TOURISM

Co-Chairs: Laura Gurreri & Eric Menzer

RECOMMENDATION #1

Conduct a regional leisure-market advertising campaign to jump-start visitation in summer 2021 (\$500,000)

RECOMMENDATION #2

Replenish and beef-up the Tourism Grant Fund for projects that prioritize hotel room nights (\$3 million)

RECOMMENDATION #3

Direct significant funding to the York Expo Center for facility investments that will help attract meeting, convention & sports business well into the future (\$10 million)

Other updates or information to share related to York County's recovery:

In the original Recovery Plan, we described the hospitality and tourism sector as the “tip of the spear” when it came to economic damage from the pandemic. Those words were borne out over the past 12 months. Performance venues and tourism attractions were shuttered, business travel came to almost a complete halt, youth sports events and tournaments were cancelled or kept local, and restaurants were forced to close altogether or operate at reduced capacity. As a result, hotel occupancy plunged to an all-time low.

There were a few bright spots. Some restaurants were able to quickly switch to delivery and add outdoor dining capacity. The Appell Center partnered with the York Revolution to present an outdoor weekend concert, and of course the York County Commissioners allocated significant funding to this sector through direct grant and by partnering with YCEA to operate business relief programs using federal and state funding. These programs kept the hospitality and tourism sector on life support and helped much of it survive in York County. Our recommendations now are focused on rebuilding.

We recommend that further investment be directed primarily at reviving the tourism sector – specifically at rebuilding visitation to York County for leisure and event/group travel. Of all the aspects of this sector, hotels are the portion that has suffered very significantly and which cannot recover until travel reaches close to pre-pandemic levels. This is particularly acute because 40% of room nights in York County are generated by business travel, and industry predictions are that it will be 2024 before business travel fully returns.

Visitors from more than 50 miles away are the key driver of importing dollars to York, through spending at gas stations, hotels, restaurants and other support activities. Prior to the pandemic, York had developed a highly-effective sales effort that brought a constant flow of youth sports events to the York Expo Center and other venues such as the Veterans Memorial Park softball complex, PeoplesBank Park, local school district athletic fields, the Grumbacher Center, York College of Pennsylvania, and the York City Ice Arena. Combined with trade shows, this sub-sector of the tourism economy alone generated \$47 million in annual economic impact in York, anchored by 25,000 hotel room nights annually. This was being complimented by effective marketing for leisure visitors using the new “Have it Made” brand campaign in cooperation with the downtown York and Hanover organizations, and dozens of private (for profit and non-profit) venues and attractions.

A first priority must be to restore the staff and sales and marketing capacity of Explore York until room tax revenues recover. The Commissioners have been working with Explore York to do so by altering the allocation of those funds in the short term. An immediate priority should be a campaign to advertise York’s outdoor and

cultural travel assets this summer to the regional New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and Washington DC markets with residents hungry to travel. We recommend an immediate \$500,000 allocation to Explore York for this purpose, to be coordinated with Explore York's brand partners. Such advertising can be implemented almost overnight through social media and digital tools.

Second, we recommend that the existing Tourism Grant Fund be used as the primary vehicle to inject significant funding into front-line tourism organizations, with a focus on generating overnight stays.

Using the established grant infrastructure and committee of appointed representatives will allow vetting of applications at a more thorough level than could be accomplished by the County Commissioners. We recommend that \$3 million be allocated to this fund, with mandate that \$2 million be allocated by the end of 2021, and the balance by June 30, 2022. As has been the past practice, a staff position to administer the program should be funded from this allocation.

Finally, there is no question that the York Expo Center is the foundation of York's event travel sector, and that it is forced to compete with facilities that are often owned or subsidized by government entities. This is an opportunity to make significant facility and infrastructure investments at the Expo Center specifically designed to improve the likelihood of winning bids for events. We recommend that \$10 million be designated for this purpose, and that the Expo Center submit to the Commissioners a specific plan to maximize the effectiveness of this spending, and that the money be awarded for those specific purposes. We suggest that the Commissioners convene a small advisory panel of industry experts to assist them in reviewing and acting upon the Expo Center's suggested plan/application.

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PUBLIC POLICY

Co-Chairs: Bob Reilly & Brendan Harris

RECOMMENDATION #1

(County) The COVID-19 crisis exposed our County's vulnerabilities in its ability to manage and mitigate a pandemic event. As a result, the county should continue to review the potential creation of a county-wide health department or other expansion of public health capacity in York County.

RECOMMENDATION #2

(Federal/State) Advocate for broadband infrastructure funding and incentives to aid in connectivity, technological capacity, inclusion of communities without access, and competitiveness. Call for specific build out of appropriate digital infrastructure to address digital divide facing low-income communities, people of color, and rural communities.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Expedite allocation of County grant dollars to non-profit organizations providing critical services such as child-care, early childhood education, food, long-term care, housing, and employment training.

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REAL ESTATE RECOVERY

Co-Chairs: Dave Bode and Shanna Terroso

RECOMMENDATION #1

Continue to monitor the implementation of the C.A.R.E.S funding on rental assistance programs being administered by the CPC.

Subverting a potential rental crisis. According to data provided by Fourth Economy, as of March 1, 2021, 18.5% of renter households nationally were behind on their payments. If this rate holds true for York County, 8,000 renter households would be behind on their payments.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Work to identify the households who are at risk for foreclosure and provide them with resources and education materials on existing programs available to assist them in preventing foreclosure such as housing counseling with the CPC and YHAP programs.

Subverting a potential foreclosure crisis. According to data provided by Fourth Economy, as of March 1, 2021, 10.3% of owner households nationally were behind on their payments. If this rate holds true for York County, 13,300 owner households would be behind on their payments.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Addressing the Housing Inventory Shortage.

The York County Residential Real Estate market has historically low inventory. In April of 2021 the months' supply of inventory in York County was .91 months. A balanced market is considered 4-6 months' supply. The result of this inventory shortage has led to multiple offers on listed properties, homes selling well above list price and frustrated buyers who continue to lose out on home after home because of the intense competition. The median home sale price is up 13% over 1 year and 20% over two years. If those home sale price increases continue to accelerate at this pace, it will leave homeownership out of the reach of many of our constituents. There are a number of contributing factors to the shortage of inventory; the increased demand for housing, historically low interest rates, population increases, etc. But the number one reason for the inventory shortage is we simply have not been building enough homes to satisfy the population needs of our community. Essentially, we have had a "drought" of new home construction over the past 12 years. In 2005 York County issued 3,064 new residential units building permits. In 2008 that number had fallen to 1,375 and continued to fall to rock bottom of 668 permits a year. We had 12 years in a row of building less than a 1/3 of the homes we were in 2005. Overcoming 12 years of under production in new home construction will not be solved overnight but there are a few methods that York County should explore in address this inventory shortage.

- Work with the York County Planning Commission to continue to identify appropriate growth areas in our community on where development can and should occur. Work with the municipalities to streamline development in those areas.
- Identify ways to address the inflated costs associated with building materials.
- Encourage job training and skill development in new home construction trades to address the labor shortage in this area.
- Identify underutilized commercial spaces that could potentially be converted into residential spaces.

Explore the idea of offering tax incentives to investment property owners who sell their single-family residential units to homeowner occupants.

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TECHNOLOGY CAPACITY

Co-Chairs: Mark Kandryawtz & Andrew Paxton

RECOMMENDATION #1

Continue to Invest in Broadband Infrastructure funding and incentives, as this is a proven need that will limit our competitiveness, technological capacity, and inclusion of communities without access.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Continue to document and invest in solutions to York County's digital divide in both urban and rural settings

RECOMMENDATION #3

Continue to collect data on technological needs and capacity as York County continues its recovery

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VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Co-Chairs: Jenny Englerth, Bev Mackereth, Jose Santiago

RECOMMENDATION #1

Invest in capacity building, software and systems change around the ways in which clients of social service organizations receive information and move through the County's and non-profit providers' network of services.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Funding to support lower income families access affordable, quality housing and alleviate potential housing/homelessness crisis at the end of the eviction moratoriums. This can be achieved by:

- Creating and preserving affordable housing stock
- Increased collaborations between housing and health/social service sectors to provide supportive services for people experiencing homelessness and/or at risk of homelessness
- Landlord incentives
- Financially support the creation of a landlord-tenant mediation program (Affordable Housing Advocates has been taking steps to explore the creation of such a program for the county).

RECOMMENDATION #3

In the 2020 YoCo Strong Recovery Task Force Report, a top priority recommendation identified the following, "Establish a County Health Bureau to coordinate the county's public health response to current and future pandemics and other emergencies." In keeping with that recommendation, we now recommend direction of COVID Rescue Act Funds for a sustainable phased approach to implementation as outlined in the feasibility study produced with the county's federal CARES Act funds. The Healthy York County Coalition submitted a recommendation letter in support of this task force recommendation, which can be [viewed here](#).

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ECONOMIC RECOVERY & RESTART

Co-Chairs: Abe Amoros and Kevin Schreiber

RECOMMENDATION #1

Allocate funds for a second round of Restart Grants to nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses (\$10M total)

- Continue to prioritize minority business enterprises, women-owned business and other groups or sectors disproportionately impacted by the COVID pandemic
- Permit restaurants to apply but prorate those who recently received CHIRP
- Dedicate a portion of the funds for a Start Up Grant round to assist the launch of new business growth in the wake of the recession and support businesses precluded from applying to other state and federal relief program
- Utilize a portion of funds to capitalize a countywide CDFI to begin a revolving loan fund for small business recovery

RECOMMENDATION #2

Invest in workforce development, training, certification, and reemployment programs

- Particular focus should be given to assist those unemployed or under-employed to gain reemployment and in assisting high school seniors transition to employment upon graduation
- Continue utilization of Virtual Career Fairs, and Countywide Hiring Fair (in-person) at PeoplesBank Park.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Support the expansion of affordable, convenient, quality childcare, which was already a challenge prior to COVID. The pandemic exacerbated this challenge as a plurality of ELC's closed permanently due to the pandemic. Access to childcare will continue to prove an impediment for rapid hiring and employment stability.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Continue implementation of the YoCo Fiber network business plan with a significant investment in York County's middle mile. Broadband is a priority use identified in the Rescue Act guidelines and the county's proactive use of CARES Act funds positions York well to continue leveraging federal dollars for this purpose.

RECOMMENDATION #5

Per Rescue Fund priorities, evaluate investments in key infrastructure projects that will spur economic recovery, especially those related to the tourism industry and the outdoor economy

EDUCATION & CHILDCARE

Co-Chairs: Christy Renjilian, Jean Treuthart

RECOMMENDATION #1

Onboarding, training, and coaching for new child care staff. Provide funds for clearances, required trainings, coaching, soft skills provided by Child Care Consultants and YCEA (\$250,000 per year)

RECOMMENDATION #2

Expand existing program to support individuals starting a home-based family child care program. Child Care Consultants created this one of a kind program nearly 25 years ago and is seeing an increased demand. (\$50,000 per year)

RECOMMENDATION #3

Scholarships for "ALICE" families who need assistance paying for Childcare but don't qualify. Funds would be distributed by Child Care Consultants to the child care programs based upon the child's actual attendance and would cover a portion of the families' costs to help move them towards self-sufficiency. (\$100,000 per year)

RECOMMENDATION #4

Financial supports for existing child care programs. Funds to be used to cover operating expenses, particularly salary and benefits, training, coaching. (\$500,000)

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K-12 EDUCATION

Chair: Dr. Joshua Doll

RECOMMENDATION #1

Support the use of educational technologies which have been proven effective at driving 21st century instructional practices.

(\$150,000 / district or allocation based on student size)

RECOMMENDATION #2

Enhance professional development opportunities for district staff with the goal of enhancing an employee's ability to utilize technology for teaching students and connecting with families. (\$50,000 per district)

RECOMMENDATION #3

Expand access to instructional opportunities to help all students achieve academic excellence (i.e. summer programs, after school programs, enhancements to daily instruction, etc...). (\$50,000 per district)

RECOMMENDATION #4

Ensure that post-pandemic county supports are in place to assist and enhance the effort of local school districts (i.e. expanded mental health services, emergency management, Children and Youth abuse investigations, attendance/truancy supports, and public health needs). (Cost as determined by the County of York)

Other updates or information to share related to York County's recovery:

A meeting with County Superintendents, YCEA, and County of York in the works to discuss RESCUE Act funds allocated directly to school districts and the remaining resources needed.

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NONPROFIT SECTOR

Co-Chairs: Anne Druck, Kelley Gibson, Jane Conover

RECOMMENDATION #1

Allocate recovery funding specifically for nonprofits. (Not lumped or competitive with small business. (\$2,000,000)

- Invite grantmakers to advise County on grants to nonprofits.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Advocate for state to allocate funding for nonprofits.

RECOMMENDATION #3

Establish multiple rounds of grants as needs change.

RECOMMENDATION #4

County helps compile data on nonprofit impact from its human services partners to help make the case for nonprofit support.

Other updates or information to share related to York County's recovery:

Nonprofits are struggling to secure and retain staff because they are unable to pay competitive salaries. Nonprofits also see increased need and are looking to grow staff to meet that need. County could evaluate whether its human service nonprofit partners are paying living wage and if not, consider increasing financial support to help with job stability. This subcommittee requests that the County consider the disproportionate impact of the COVID pandemic on communities of color when making its decisions.

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