



CITY OF MOUNT VERNON
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DATE: April 13, 2020
CONTACT: Tanya Newell, Mayor's Office
Office (740) 393-9517

Economic Recovery Task Force Announced

MOUNT VERNON - Knox County Emergency Management Agency and Knox Public Health have been tireless in their efforts to inform the community of directives, statistics, and new information coming from the state and federal levels of how to handle the COVID-19 virus on the front lines. Representatives from several agencies around the county are participating in countless meetings and briefings where information changes at the turn of each passing minute.

One of the primary concerns is in protecting the public by providing care and support to the healthcare community, first responders, and the general public in maintaining practices to keep flattening the curve of peak cases caused by the virus. As long as the virus remains a threat, those activities have essentially cut off the economic circulation for a large number of businesses. Therefore, the wealth of our community is compromised. In response to the business community's health, Knox County EMA Director, Mark Maxwell, announced the expansion of an Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF), which will serve as a special sub-committee to the already created Long Term Recovery Committee (LTRC) currently serving Knox County's disaster plan.

"The Long Term Recovery Committee was started a year ago when EMA revised the current version of our disaster plan," said Maxwell. "Most of that planning was the beginning of a structure of addressing immediate needs. We knew it was only a start."

The ERTF sub-committee is a natural extension to address business-specific needs during and after a disaster. According to the National Disaster Recovery Framework, there are short-term, intermediate, and long-term recovery planning structures to help guide communities through their own recovery plan. Included in these areas are Mass Care/Sheltering, Infrastructure and Debris Management, Business Support, Emotional/Psychological Care, Public Health and Healthcare, and Mitigation (i.e., informational gathering, sharing, and plan execution).

"It was important that we had someone who is well-connected to the business community from a county-wide perspective, so the group of us who met on the subject chose Knox County Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Carol Grubaugh to lead the charge," said Maxwell.

Grubaugh and her Chamber staff have been working closely with Jeff Gottke from the Area Development Foundation, Anthony McNeal from Main Street Mount Vernon, Kelly Carey from Ohio Job and Family Services, and City of Mount Vernon Mayor Matt Starr. Currently, the Knox County Chamber of Commerce provides daily electronic updates of assistance for the business community, as well as informational links to garner state and federal support. Local support does exist to non-profit agencies providing critical social services through the Knox County Foundation and Food for the Hungry. The focus for ERTF sub-committee will be on the for-profit community.

"Where Knox Public Health provides information on the community health side of this pandemic, we're focused on being the source for the business community to turn to during the time of need," said Grubaugh. "We have to make sure that our businesses and communities from around the county can

somehow find ways to get through this and be ready to get back to work when the stay-at-home order and other restrictions are lifted.”

The mission of the ERTF is divided into a triage approach where short-term measures explore temporary actions to support business reopening’s, maintenance, and reestablish cash flow. At the intermediate planning level, the establishment of a “one-stop” recovery center approach is well underway with the creation of a centralized document for finding financial assistance. Regarding long-term strategies, the ERTF will take the lead from the Area Development Foundation, which has already made headway.

“Getting businesses help now and in the near future is what we are most concerned about,” said Grubaugh.

Planning for economic recovery is not an easy task, and it is not without disagreement on how quickly to start getting people back to work in the midst of a pandemic. Some people and employers are ready to get back to work and start regenerating the cash flow, but it could come at a price. One of the first principles of economic recovery is in the protection of the workforce, something that Knox County Health Commissioner Julie Miller remains passionate about. Miller’s concerns are backed by data from the Spanish Flu pandemic, which came in waves between 1917 and 1919.

“Keeping our workers healthy is what we are trying to do at the Health Department among other things,” said Miller. “In the Spanish Flu pandemic, some communities that did well took precautions at the onset of the threat, but had bigger problems when they let down their guard too quickly.”

Miller added, “When a second and third wave of the virus returned, that’s when some communities lost more lives. The economy took much longer to recover not to mention life in general because people stopped taking precautions. That’s why I worry so much about keeping workers safe.”

Protection of the workers is extremely important to Starr, who recently saw an immediate need. “It’s important that we remember to take care of the people who take care of the people,” said Starr.

Starr has been keeping in regular contact with different business owners and managers in the critical supply chain for the general public from fast food restaurants, retailers, service industries, and industrial and manufacturing companies with limited workforce currently on site. The need recently drew Starr’s attention on his weekly trip to the grocery store for supplies.

“It didn’t take long to see how exhausted most of the front line staff appeared,” said Starr. “Working several long hours and all night stocking shelves while dealing directly with an impatient public broke my heart.”

Starr immediately went to work contacting critical suppliers in Mount Vernon and created a list of job openings for some of those businesses to offer support. Grubaugh, McNeal, and Gottke included the list on the Chamber’s daily email for businesses needing immediate assistance and echoed the urgency for help. Grubaugh noted that Opportunity Knox has additional information on local job openings and is helping people find work, too.

“If people who are healthy and want to work for a seasonal length of time, there are businesses who can use help right now,” Grubaugh said. “It might offer a small break to the front line staff who are working many days or nights in a row and need some time off to recharge.”

The ERTF is planning to meet weekly and will report their recommendations to Maxwell and other members of the Long Term Recovery Committee. Knox County EMA will share the plans on their

updates as they become available. A wide cross section of countywide leaders from respective communities and businesses are being recruited to provide help to the task force.

“Our business community is very generous in Knox County, so we’re thrilled that this sub-committee is carving out a plan to make sure that they have a place to turn and will be able to continue in their generosity,” said Maxwell. “We’re confident that we’ll have a solid plan and will make us all stronger than before and even better prepared for any future disaster.”

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Callout Box: [National Disaster Recovery Framework](#) diagram showing the Recovery Continuum timelines, tasks and considerable overlap among recovery tasks during the short term, intermediate term and long term phases of an incident. Courtesy of FEMA.